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THE SPIRIT AND SUBSTANCE  
OF URDU PROSE  
UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF  
SIR SAYYID AHMAD KHAN









Shibli

Arnold

Wiqar'ul-Mulk

Muhsin'ul-Mulk

Nazir Ahmad

Hali

*The Spirit and Substance*  
of  
**URDU PROSE**  
*under the influence of*  
**SIR SAYYID AHMAD KHAN**

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KASHMIRI BAZAR, LAHORE

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*To*  
*MY FATHER*  
*in*  
*AFFECTION AND GRATITUDE*



## NOTE OF THANKS

It is my pleasant duty to express my sincere thankfulness to M. Muḥammad Shafī, M.A. (Cantab.), Principal, Panjab University Oriental College, Lahore who urged me to undertake the critical study of the present subject. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Mawlānā Sulaymān Nadvī who kindly supplied a few details about the life of Shibli.

I am similarly indebted to Professor Aḥmad ‘Alī Qurayshī, Professor M.A. Laṭīf (both of the Islamia College, Peshawar), Khwājah ‘Abd’ul Waheed, Khwājah Muḥammad Saleem and Shaykh Muḥammad Ikrām, I.C.S., who kindly revised the material of this book and made useful changes in many places. The criticism and suggestions offered by these learned gentlemen have, in various ways, saved me from many sins of omission and commission for which I am grateful to them.

S.M.A.





## FOREWORD

ONE of the happiest results of the diffusion of Islamic culture in India is the Urdu language. Born and bred under the ægis of Persian, it rapidly absorbed the spirit and substance of that charming speech of Iran. As a vehicle of literary and poetic thought it soon grew to be a replica of Persian and developed the same charms in its features.

Urdu began to be cultivated as a literary and scientific language in the 18th century. It made rapid progress under the auspices of the Fort William and the Delhi Colleges. A large number of books were translated and compiled, introducing Western sciences to the Indian people. But it was not before the great Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan came forward, as a reformer of society, that the Urdu language, under his literary leadership, began to assimilate all that was best in Western thought. The great impetus which he and his talented disciples gave to the progress of Urdu transformed it

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into one of the most scientific languages of Asia and prepared the way for the foundation of the Osmania University at Hyderabad where it is the medium of instruction for the most advanced courses of study in all European sciences.

It was therefore extremely desirable that this literary movement in Urdu, with its far-reaching consequences, should be made the subject of investigation by a scholar. Dr. Syed Mohd. Abdullah is to be congratulated on taking up this fascinating subject for his research. He has been able to show the gradual development of the mind of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan under the political and social circumstances of his time and the shaping of his thought under Western influences. A close study of these influences is the salient feature of originality in Dr. Abdullah's work. The importance of this study cannot be exaggerated. The conditions that shaped the mind of Sir Sayyid, transmitted their effect through his dynamic personality to the literary and critical works of his followers, notably Hali and Shibli.

Dr. Abdullah has also subjected to a sane criticism the Urdu prose works of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Hali, Shibli, Nazir Ahmad and others. It is gratifying to see that his conclusions and views are

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based on sound arguments. Both as regards the choice of the subject and the manner of its treatment, his book is, to the best of my knowledge, the first of its kind.

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MOHAMMAD IQBAL

*12th February, 1940*



## INTRODUCTION

THE suggestion of writing a book like this was made to me, a few years back, by my revered teacher and guide, Principal Muḥammad Shafi' (Panjab University Oriental College, Lahore), at whose advice I started the study of this special subject. I first tried to acquaint myself with the principles of English literary criticism and went through a large number of books—including Walker's *Literature of the Victorian Era* which stimulated my mind greatly.

It appeared to me that although several books had been written by distinguished writers on modern Urdu prose, yet none of these laid proper stress on the social and political background of the time. A systematic account of the cultural, religious and political influences that dominated the minds of the writers of Urdu during the nineteenth century of the Christian Era, was nowhere available. Similarly, no attention, it seemed to me, had been paid to the exploration of the main sources that made

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modern Urdu prose a great vehicle of expression for literary ideas and scientific concepts ; and although its philological characteristics had been investigated by more than one writer, the main currents of thought had hardly been touched by any.

One of the best and most comprehensive books, so far written on the subject, is Saksena's *History of Urdu Literature* (1927) ; but unfortunately the wide range of the subject-matter dealt with by the author did not permit of a scientific treatment of the main currents of thought that ran through the whole field of Urdu literature. He has confined himself to an account of the development of Urdu literature from the earliest times to the present day with a critical appreciation of the works of selected authors but the influences that brought about remarkable changes in the substance of literature have not been dealt with. Another book which deals exclusively with the prose literature is Tanhā's *Siyar'ul-Muṣannifin* (two vols., 1928) which is unfortunately lacking in originality and contains little analytical criticism based on modern principles. Dr. Muḥyī'ud-Dīn Qādirī's works, *Ruḥ-i-Tanqīd*, *Tanqīdī Maqālāt* and *Urdu ke Asālīb-i-Bayān* deserve a higher place, as these were intended to cultivate and foster a critical taste for understanding and judging Urdu prose according to the higher canons of criticism as laid down by

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the West. The scope of these books is, however, limited and they only touch one phase or other of the subject without covering the whole range.

Dr. S. A. Laṭīf's *Influence of English Literature on Urdu Literature* (1924) is, perhaps, the most conspicuous work which, in some respects, may justifiably be called the best book of its kind so far written. This remarkable piece of writing, despite some mistakes of fact and interpretation, deserves our praise and appreciation. The aim of the author has been, first, to "analyse and sift the main ideas which have been at work and pursue them right across the several branches of literature," and, secondly, to trace "the influences which had gone to shape their thought and expression."

This last-mentioned book is undoubtedly original in its design and treatment, but full justice has not been done to the subject, owing to the limited scope and nature of the work, which only aimed at giving a bare outline to the reader without examining the actual operation of the main influences traceable in the various departments of literature. For example, while a reference has been made to the influence of English on modern Urdu prose in its different manifestations, it has not been explained which distinct ideas and conceptions were borrowed from the West and how they were later on



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assimilated by different writers in their works. It was with the intention of investigating these ideas that I made up my mind to trace the main influences and tendencies of the time in their bearing on Urdu literature and to pick out and examine the chief theories and conceptions which swayed the minds of our writers since the commencement of India's contact with English literary and cultural ideals. But, "as it is a task which will occupy the lifetime, not of one, but several collaborators, each interested in a separate phase of this interesting problem," I have preferred for the present, to single out for examination, the prose work of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān and his friends and followers who worked with him in the cause of producing a new type of literature in India.

This period of Urdu prose is of extraordinary importance and interest for two obvious reasons. Firstly, because, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān was admittedly the chief agency through which foreign influences found their way into Urdu literature and made themselves felt in different ways. But for this lofty personality, Urdu would have been deprived of the healthy influences which went to fertilise the language and enrich the minds of the writers. Secondly because sufficient stress has not so far been laid on the results which were achieved through

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the influence of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān, who by his example and persuasion, produced men whose original and valuable contributions to Urdu literature have made it a living medium of expression pulsating with fresh ideas and principles of high literary significance. It is, therefore, essential to trace the influence of this powerful personality in the pages of the books written in the "atmosphere of Aligarh"—as the term goes—by his friends and disciples.

Perhaps it would have been desirable to include in this survey an examination of the rise and growth of modern Urdu poetry; but after much consideration and thought the present writer has omitted this aspect of literature for the time being. The new influences are more discernible in Urdu prose which is of much greater importance as regards output, copiousness and originality. The influences on poetry have scarcely brought about any considerable change in the outlook and attitude of the poets, barring, of course, Hālī who alone represented poetry in this group of writers. Almost all of them attempted poetry but they were excessively occupied with prose, and poetry formed only a minor occupation with them. It, therefore, appeared to me advisable to leave out Hālī as a poet (but not as a prose-writer) and devote myself to an exclusive

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treatment of prose in order to make this a connected and a comprehensive survey of the works of a well-defined circle of prose-writers.

As far as general arrangement and method are concerned, the present treatise has been prepared, to some extent, on the model of Walker's *Literature of the Victorian Era* (1910). The subject has not been pursued in the stereotyped fashion of treating each author separately, but one department of literature after another has been discussed in the manner of Walker which has the obvious advantage of permitting a comprehensive study of the condition of various branches of prose and of tracing the attitudes and moods of different authors as the result of changes brought about by influences such as those of environment and society. Thus there are chapters on Theology, History, Biography, Literary Criticism, Miscellaneous Prose and Story-writing, each department having been given proper space in accordance with the importance and interest it carries. Sir Sayyid and Shibli have been discussed at greater length and the former has been allotted a special chapter for reasons of his central position.

It may be objected why Theology has been treated as a separate branch of literature? My answer is the one given by the editor of *The London Mercury* (March, 1938) to a correspondent who had

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asked : " How is it that articles not immediately concerned with literature or the arts, sometimes, find a place in *The London Mercury*. I thought," the correspondent said, " that our magazine (*The London Mercury*) was only a literary magazine ! " " Well," replied the editor, " literature is not so very small a subject " and that " the whole of life is our province, in so far as it is approached in a certain way—the way, shall I say, in which an imaginative person is seeking to understand it or to make it intelligible." Was not Theology in the period under review a potent factor in the life and mood of the people and were not theological ideas dominating the minds of even those who were not theologians but historians, biographers and novelists ? Theology was, at that time, not a hand-maiden but the " Queen " of all Sciences and no contemporary writer was immune from its influence. Owing to its effective bearing on life and character, therefore, it would have been a mistake to exclude Theology from our review.

The reader will notice in this treatise that a number of minor authors, who came under the influence of Sir Sayyid Aḥmad, have not been mentioned. In fact, writers who came under the spell of this able leader can be classified into two main divisions : those who worked and lived with him for a

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part or the whole of their lives and made original contributions to literature (such as Ḥālī, Shibli, Zakā'ullah, Nazīr Aḥmad, Chiragh 'Alī, Muḥsin'ul-Mulk, Waqār'ul-Mulk and Waḥīd'ud-Dīn Salīm): and those who were his admirers and helpers but did not either come into close contact with him or did not accomplish anything of originality and lasting value in the domain of literature. To the latter class belong authors like M. Bashīr'ud-Dīn, editor of *al-Bashīr*; Shams'ul-'Ulamā M. Mamtāz 'Alī of Lahore, the author of *Maqāsid'ul-Qur'ān*; Khalīfah Muḥammad Ḥusain, the author of *I'jāz'ut-Tanzīl*, etc., and M. Sirāj'ud-Dīn of Rāwalpindī, the editor of *Chuhdawīn Ṣaddī* and the author of *Sirat'ul-Farūq*, etc. All of them were influenced by Sir Sayyid but their works do not seem to have won the appreciation or recognition of literary critics. They are scarcely known and read by moderns and have sunk into oblivion. Thus it is unnecessary for me to include them in this critical survey which is entirely devoted to the great masters of Urdu literature of the period under review.

In conclusion, it seems proper to offer an apology for the possible shortcomings and defects of this small book. I have tried my utmost to be accurate and correct, yet to quote Professor Saintsbury, as Mr. Saksena has done, "none but a charlatan will pretend

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that he has himself written and none but a very unreasonable person will expect any one else to write a history of the kind free from blunders."

S.M. ABDULLAH



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**I**

**SIR SAYYID AHMAD KHAN**

**A**



# I

## SIR SAYYID AHMAD KHAN

### THE BACKGROUND

SIR SAYYID AHMAD KHAN was characteristically a child of the 19th Century, a period of great upheaval and activity all over the world including India. Two main currents helped to shape the mind of this conspicuous leader of thought and religion : first, the political and spiritual discontent in India and second, the influence of Victorian literature and culture on Indian and Islamic conceptions of religion and life.

The condition of society in India was deplorable  
Condition of                      and the country was in a state of moral  
society in India.              bankruptcy during the eighteenth and  
the nineteenth centuries.

Religion had become a medley of rigid ceremonies and spiritless rituals and society had sunk to the lowest depth of degeneration. Both needed wholesale reform.

Long before the influx of European influences began, a movement for religious reform had already taken its birth in India. It was started by Sayyid Ahmad of Bareli who raised a standard of revolt against the unquestioned domination of a demoralised and ultra-conservative priestcraft.

He was born in 1782 A.D. and received his early education in the orthodox fashion. Later, however, a pilgrimage to Mecca brought him into contact with the doctrines of Wahhābism. On his return to India, he felt that the life of the Mussulmans presented all the features of a corrupt society. Sayyid Ahmad, therefore, started a reform movement and made an endeavour to shake off the stupor into which the Muslims had sunk. He proclaimed a *Jihad* and, for some time, his movement seemed to be gathering momentum and strength, but it met a speedy fall. Whatever the results of this reform movement, it is certain that it paved the way for a new change which had already started. Sayyid Ahmad Barelawi was killed in 1831 A.D. while fighting the Sikh forces in the Hazārah District.

The ingress of new ideas and influences in the Religious country had already begun when discontent. Charles Grant wrote a treatise under the title of *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects in Great Britain, parti-*

*cularly with Respect to Morals and on the Means of Improving it* (1792). The first part of the 19th Century was a period of remarkable enthusiasm for religious discussion and analytical study of belief which manifested itself in various forms. Several fresh avenues of religious thought were explored and new sects founded, such as the Brahmū Samāj and the Theosophical Society which stood for the unity and equality of all the existing religions. Christian missionaries were already in the field. They attacked the religions of India, including Islam, from different points. Educationally, the Muslims were deplorably backward and politically their power was on the wane and was finally extinguished in 1857 A.D.

The Fort William College, Calcutta, rendered English education and the rise of the Vernaculars. invaluable service to the cause of Urdu literature, especially prose. Persian, uptil then an important political and official language of India, had been steadily losing ground since the beginning of the century but during the eighteen-thirties its death-knell was sounded by Lord Macaulay who, in his famous "Minute on Education", criticised the efficacy of that language as a medium of instruction and a language of the court. In 1835 A.D., the courts abolished Persian and opened a highroad of progress for Vernaculars. This was the age of Ghalib and

Rekhtah poets through whom Urdu was becoming popular. But it awaited the advent of a more versatile scholar who could infuse in it fresh life and strength and make it a powerful vehicle of expression. Compare the meagre stock of Urdu literature before Sir Sayyid with the splendid output made available by Sir Sayyid and his friends.

It may, however, be borne in mind that this  
 The influence of      great leader, Sir Sayyid Ahmad  
 Victorian spirit.      Khan, was profoundly influenced by  
 the ideas and impulses of the 19th Century England  
 which exerted its influence not only on his literary  
 attitude but also on his life. Thus his life may  
 rightly be described as the story of English influences  
 imbibed and received through different channels of  
 inspiration.

So, an investigation of the leading principles of  
 Some living      Victorianism in the writings of Sir  
 principles of the      Sayyid and his friends who borrowed  
 Victorian spirit.      so much from Victorian thought,  
 would not be an altogether valueless task. In the pages  
 of their writings, we find traces of the dominant ideas  
 of Victorian England. The advance of democracy,  
 the general diffusion of knowledge and the progress  
 of science created a deep spiritual discontent among  
 the people of Europe. As a consequence of Dar-  
 winism, there was a conflict between Instinct and

Reason, the most pronounced manifestation of which was the clash of Religion and Science. All "traditional landmarks" were swept away before the stormy advance of science. There was, however, an interesting phase of this fight. It was the attempt on the part of the defenders of Faith to establish the truth of Religion on scientific grounds and "to bring the spirit within the compass of intelligence."

The defenders of Religion in India also attempted to counteract the disruptive forces of scientific knowledge in the same manner and tried to employ Science and Reason to the edification of Faith.

It was in this way that English influences New form and substance. worked in India and contributed towards making literature and with it Urdu prose rich and pregnant with living thought. The impracticable, flowery, purposeless style gave place to a clear, precise and well-balanced way of writing. There was practically no prose before Sir Sayyid whose creative energy brought into existence a strong, simple and living language, admirably suited for all literary and scientific purposes.

How this revolution took place is the subject of our present inquiry.

In 1817 A.D. a child (destined to be a great man), Sayyid Ahmad was born at Delhi. He was Sayyid born in 1817 A.D. Ahmad Khan. He was brought up



and educated by his mother, as his father had died during his infancy. He had no opportunity to study English at school and it was during his 'service' days that he acquainted himself with that language to some extent. The intimacy and contact which existed between his family and some English officers, especially the British Resident, General Ochterloney, must have greatly helped to give a leaning to his mind towards English culture and education. But he received the usual orthodox education and qualified for a subordinate position in the service of the British Government in India.

His career as a Government servant was long, eventful and meritorious. He rose from the humble position of a Sarish-tadār to that of the Subordinate Judge at Bijnour. He became a Munşiff in 1841 A.D., and was posted to Mainpurī. He was transferred to Fatḥpūr Sikrī in 1842 A.D., and to Delhi in 1846 A.D. In 1855 A.D., he became Şadr Amīn of Bijnour, where he had to pass very anxious time during the Mutiny (1857 A.D.). In 1858 A.D., he was appointed Şadr-'uṣ-Şudūr of Murādābād and was transferred to Ghāzīpūr in 1862 A.D. In 1864 A.D., he was posted at 'Aligarh, a place destined to play a conspicuous part in the history of the whole Muslim community. In 1867 A.D., he filled the post of the Judge Small

Cause Court at Benāras where he remained till the end of his official career. During this period, he paid a visit to England where he spent more than a year (April 1869 A.D.—October 1870 A.D.). After his retirement, he devoted himself to the furtherance of the cause of Muslim education and laid the foundation of the renowned M.A.-O. College at 'Alīgarh, to the service of which he dedicated the remaining part of his life. He died on the 28th day of March in the year 1898 A.D.

We cannot do full justice, in this short treatise, to the long and stirring life of this great personality. For detailed information, the reader is requested to refer to more exhaustive books. For the present purpose, it would be sufficient to say that he was a man of unbounded energy and vigour and his dynamic personality was always active and busy exerting its influence on the environments and creating interest in things and ideas in which he believed and believed sincerely.

The literary career of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan Evolution of Sir Sayyid's mind. Three Periods. can be conveniently divided into three distinct periods, which indicate clearly the progressive stages in the evolution of his mind.

Period I: From the beginning of his literary life up to 1857 A.D. which again can be

## SIR SAYYID AHMAD KHAN

sub-divided into

- (a) the period, in which he was under the influence of the purely old tradition, and
- (b) the period, in which he began to come into contact with European influences.

Period II : From 1857 A.D. to his visit to England (1869 A.D.).

Period III : From 1870 A.D. till the end of his life.

### PERIOD I

It has already been said that Sir Sayyid was educated on conventional lines. He had  
**Distinctive features of the First Period.** brilliant traditions of learning and scholarship in his family. Mathematics was a favourite subject with his elders and mysticism a popular pursuit. He had inherited a taste for history from his ancestors. They had long been attached to the Mughal Court at Delhi and the study of History, apart from its being a mark of culture, was considered to be a suitable means for winning the favour of the Monarch.

Sir Sayyid, in his early life, came into touch with Wahhābī ideas under the direct influence of a Wahhābī leader, Shāh Ismā'il Shahīd.

Simultaneously with these tendencies, we notice in him, even in this early period, a marked taste for

research on more or less modern lines, and he did some editing work at the instance of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

It would not be necessary to enumerate all the books written by Sir Sayyid during this first period. Suffice it to say that the first historical book written by him was the *Jām-i-Jam'* (1839 A.D.) which gave a short account of the Mughal Emperors from Amīr Timūr to Abū Zafar Bahādur Shāh. In 1255 A.H. (1839 A.D.), he wrote a short treatise *Jalā'ul-qulub bi Zikr'il Malībub* which is a life-sketch of the Holy Prophet prepared with a view to making available to the common people a collection of true and genuine traditions to be read and repeated in the Mawlūd assemblies. Several other theological tracts were written, viz., *Tuhfah-i-Hasan* (1260 A.H.= 1844 A.D.), a refutation of Shi'ah doctrines: *Rah-i-Sunnat wa Radd-i-Bid'at* (1850 A.D.) and *Kalimāt-ul-Haqq* (1849 A.D.) in support of Wahhābī viewpoint: *Namiqah*, a letter in Persian (1852 A.D.) in defence of the doctrine of *Tasawwur-i-Shaykh*.

During these days, he wrote a few books on scientific subjects as well, but these books are of a fragmentary nature and of little permanent value. In these works, the author has approached a few

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1. Descriptive Catalogue of Persian MSS in the British Museum, London, by Charles Reu. Vol. I. p. 284.

scientific problems from the stand-point of antiquated theories. His work *at-Tashīl fī jarr'ith-thaqīl* (1844 A.D.) is the Urdu translation of Bū 'Alī Sīnā's Persian treatise on the subject of gravitation. The other two treatises: the *Fawā'id-ul-Afkār fī A'māl'il-farjār*, a translation of his grandfather's book of the same name and the *Qawl-i-Matin dar ibtāl-i-ḥarakāt-i-Zamin* (in refutation of the idea that the earth is moving) are manifestations of the older tendencies and views of our author.

But by far the most important works of Sir Sayyid during this period are the *Āthar'uṣ-Ṣanādīd* (1847 A.D.), a critical edition of the *Ā'in-i-Akbarī* and a history of the Bijnour District (1855 A.D.). This edition of the *Ā'in*, of which only the first and the third volumes are extant, the second having been lost in 1857 A.D., is a monument of Sir Sayyid's diligent research and sustained work. Its chief merit lies in detailed critical notes, copious glosses and elaborate illustrations. His *History of Bijnour* was also lost during the turmoil of the Mutiny of 1857 A.D. and no trace of it is left.

*Āthar'uṣ-Ṣanādīd* is an account of the remains, antiquities and monuments of Delhi. *Āthar'uṣ-Ṣanādīd*. This important work was written in 1847 A.D. with the active assistance of a personal

friend and a great scholar of those days, Shaykh Imām Bakhsh Şahbāi. Mawlānā Ḥālī, in his *Ḥayat-i-Jawid*<sup>1</sup> gives an account of how the work was compiled and how Şahbāi helped the author in the accomplishment of this stupendous task. When Sir Sayyid used to climb the Quṭb Mīnār for deciphering the inscription by means of an 'improvised lift' Şahbāi was very much perturbed and got uneasy out of love for his friend, who was putting his own life in grave risk for the sake of research.

The first edition of the work consisted of four chapters but in a later edition which was published in 1854 A.D., the fourth chapter was omitted. The contents of the book are :

1. Archæological remains outside the City.
2. Remains connected with the Fort.
3. Remains within the four walls of the City of Shāhjahānābād.
4. Delhi and its inhabitants.

Archæological survey in India has greatly developed since the time when the great Sir Sayyid wrote on the subject and there might be a tendency to under-rate the value of this work on the pretext of its out-of-date information in some matters. This may be true to some extent, but it is also true that it was, perhaps, the first book of its kind in Urdu.

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1. P. 37.

It was, as a matter of fact, highly appreciated during the lifetime of the author by critics including scholars, such as Garcin de Tassy, who published a French translation of the work in 1861 A.D. and William Roberts (the then Collector of Delhi), who undertook a translation of it into English but could not complete it.

The *Āthar* is undoubtedly an important work on the ruins, architecture and mausoleums of Delhi but its fourth *bab* (chapter) which was omitted by the author at the suggestion of Edward Thomas (a Sessions Judge of Delhi) had an equal importance from the point of view of authentic material and contemporary information about the society of the Mughal capital during the closing days of their empire.

The difference in the language and style of both the editions is remarkable and points clearly to the rapidity of improvement and the degree of development of the language during the forties of the 19th Century. The inflated and rhetorical style of the first edition gave place to an easy, smooth and convenient style of the modern writers.

## PERIOD II

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān was in Bijnour when the Mutiny broke out. It was a period of tremendous unrest and its consequences.

chaos. Everything was in the melting-pot. Forces of disorder and anarchy were let loose to upset the whole organisation of life and culture. Peace and order, which are beneficial to intellectual and literary production, were absent for about 20 years.

In April 1858 A.D., Sir Sayyid Ahmad was transferred to Murādābād which may be regarded as a turning-point in his life, for, henceforth, a conflict between the old and the new ideals began in his mind. From 1858 A.D. up to the year in which he visited England (1869-70), there was a transitional stage in the development of his mind and thought. He was evolving a new type of political and religious mentality. He was dissatisfied with the existing state of things and a spiritual unrest and discontent agitated his mind. He was extremely perturbed over the evil results of the Mutiny, for which the Muslim community had been held responsible in the main. He also felt that his co-religionists were in the clutches of deep lethargy of religious ignorance and that their faith had degenerated into a bundle of irrational customs, practices and beliefs.

This religious and political backwardness of his community created a profound impression on the mind of Sir Sayyid Ahmad. The Muslims had, from the very beginning of the British Rule, adopted an attitude of indifference towards the Western



education in India, and the Mutiny widened the gulf of estrangement between the ruler and the ruled.

It was, therefore, the main concern of Sir Sayyid during this epoch to remove the misunderstandings of the ruling nation about the Muslims and their part in the Mutiny. The compromise, thought Sir Sayyid, could not be stable and everlasting if it was not based on a permanent spiritual basis. He made strenuous efforts to convince the British Government that the Muslims were not religiously bound to revolt against the Government and enunciated the idea that the Muslims and the Christians both belonged to kindred Semitic religions and that there were more grounds for alliance and mutual trust between them than for enmity and distrust.

The *Ta'rikh-i-Sarkashī Bijnour* which was compiled during the Mutiny contains an account of the events that took place at Bijnour between May 1857 A.D. and April 1858 A.D. In 1859 A.D., he wrote another treatise *Asbāb-i-Baghawat-i-Hind* or the *Causes of Indian Discontent* which was translated into English by Col. Graham. In 1860 A.D., he started a bilingual paper *The Loyal Muhammadans of India* which was discontinued in 1861 A.D. It brought into light those families and men who had remained loyal to the British Government during the Mutiny.

He wrote three theological books during this period, viz., an enquiry about the word '*Naṣāra*' a treatise *Aḥkām-i-ṭa'am-i-Ahl-i-Kitāb* and the *Tabyīn'ul-Kalām*.

The last mentioned work is of great religious significance as it reveals the fundamental unity of the *Qur'an* and the Bible. This, too, is obviously an attempt to discover and promote possibilities of harmony and reconciliation between the British and the Muslims. From a purely theological point of view, it may be considered as perhaps the first book of its kind in the whole of Islamic Literature. How far the author succeeded in exploring the points of similarity between the two, is a point which need not be discussed here. It was a definite step towards religious toleration and inter-religious friendship, as the book aimed at establishing the essential unity of all the Semitic Religions.

In 1866 A.D., Sir Sayyid Aḥmad started a journal under the auspices of the Scientific Society and its Magazine. Scientific Society which was founded by him in 1846 A.D. at *Ghāzipur*.

In the beginning, articles of political nature were published in it and its declared object was to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the rulers and the subjects. But, later, the journal changed its name and came to be known as the

“ Aligarh Institute Gazette ”.

The Scientific Society of Sir Sayyid aimed at translating useful books from the European languages into Urdu, editing and publishing classical works of value and importance, and starting a paper or journal for promulgating ideas beneficial to the general Indian public. The Society was a great success and its members were able to translate several English books on different subjects.<sup>1</sup>

When Sir Sayyid was transferred to 'Aligarh, the office of this Society was also shifted to that place.

During this period, Sir Sayyid edited two more critical editions of historical books. historical works, the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* and the *Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi* of Barani which were very much appreciated by scholars, not only for the mechanical labour involved but also for the deep insight and scholarship displayed by the editor.

### PERIOD III

The change which we have already noticed Sir Sayyid's visit coming over the mind of Sir Sayyid to England. in the previous stage, was now complete. He was no longer a waverer. His doubts grew into convictions and the ideas of reform which

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1. For details see “ Urdu ” (Anjuman Taraqqi-i-Urdu), July 1935.

had been agitating his mind and been shaking his very soul since long, had now culminated in complete transformation. He was now convinced of the truth of his political and religious theory which, uptil now, had found only an imperfect expression. The iron was hot and he struck. He had now clear-cut and definite notions of what was to be done to launch a campaign of wholesale reform. He was a staunch advocate of popular education and rationalism.

In 1869 A.D. he visited London where he met some of the eminent Victorians. The influence of Victorian thought. He came back rich with English ideas and conceptions. He was the torch-bearer of Reason. He declared Reason as the sole test of a sound system of Faith. 'Nature' was his watch-word. He was a thorough 'Naturalist'—the name by which he was generally called by his opponents. In politics as in religion, his outlook was altogether changed. While he sympathised with Indian aspirations, he seceded from the Indian National Congress and exhorted his co-religionists to remain aloof from its activities. He was a liberal politician; but above all, he was interested in the education of his own community. To achieve this, the most cordial relations with the Government were considered essential. At the same time, a powerful and strong criticism of society was needed to impress

upon the minds of his brethren-in-faith, the imperative necessity of discarding old beliefs which were responsible for their moral and spiritual degradation. He also stressed the need of adapting themselves socially and politically to the new conditions.

It was a complete change, almost a metamor-  
Transformation phosis. In this period he was a  
complete. direct antithesis to the Sayyid of  
the first stage. He was a 'child of foreign influences.'  
The ideas which he borrowed from Victorian thought  
manifested themselves in the stupendous activity  
which he displayed in his writings during this period.  
His works, though eminently devoted to religion and  
politics, have got a great literary importance as they  
immensely affected the thought of those who helped  
him in his mission. These important books were the  
Khutabat-i-Ahmadiyyah (compiled in London, 1869-  
70), the Tahzib'ul-Akhlāq (24th December, 1876), a  
journal of great fame and outstanding merit, and the  
Tafsir'ul-Qur'an (begun in 1876 and left incomplete),  
an original contribution to Muslim Theology and  
Religious thought. Beside these, Sir Sayyid released  
his *Travels of England* for publication, in parts, on  
the pages of the *Journal of the Scientific Society*  
which had to be stopped later owing to popular  
opposition. In 1871 A.D., Dr. Hunter published his  
book *Our Indian Mussulmans*, in which he stressed

the point that the Mussulmans of India had no choice but to remain hostile to the British authority. Sir Sayyid wrote a rejoinder to this book and criticised its arguments severely. This criticism was first published in the *Pioneer* and an Urdu translation of it was published in the *Journal of the Scientific Society* (extending over fourteen issues from the 24th November 1871 to the 23rd February 1872 A.D.).

We propose to leave out the account of the *Tahzib'ul-Akhlaq*, aptly called the Indian Spectator, to be discussed in the chapter on Essay and Criticism.

A criticism of the *Khutabāt* and the *Tafsīr*.

An analysis of the remaining two works will show clearly what Sir Sayyid, in the latest stage of his mental evolution, thought about Religion and what compromise he suggested for harmonising Theology with Reason and Dogma with Rationalism.

Sir Sayyid was profoundly influenced by the West and received inspiration from the Victorian England particularly. Till the 19th Century, it was only in minor points such as the movement of

He grasps the spirit of this conflict in Europe and England.

the Earth that Science seemed to be in conflict with the religious theories of the Universe, but the 19th Century witnessed a remarkable change in the general outlook and attitude towards Religion. Science attacked Religion from every point of vantage.

Zoology, Anthropology, Geology, Darwinism and Biology all participated in undermining the authority of the Scriptures. New methods of criticism were discovered. The ' Law of Causation ' and the ' Idea of Development and Progress ' were applied to Religion and in every case the latter seemed to give way before the onslaughts of Scientific Truth.

Against these concerted attacks of the opponents, some exponents of Religion took a new line of defence and supported Religion with the weapons which were employed by its enemies. Henry Drummond in his memorable work *Natural Laws in the Spiritual World* (1883) made an attempt to establish the truth of Religion on Scientific grounds.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Matthew Arnold<sup>2</sup> was deeply concerned for Morality and Religion and he defended the Bible vehemently, though in a different way. The burden of his cry was " the corruption of Christianity has been due to Theology." He endeavoured to rescue the Bible from its orthodox supporters. At the same time a new ' Cult of Nature ' took its birth as a direct consequence of Darwinism.

1. H. V. Routh, *England under Victoria* (1930), p. 79.

2. J.B. Bury, *History of Freedom of Thought* (Ed. 1928), p. 218.

Sir Sayyid was one of those authors who grasped the fundamental principles of this new method. Sir Sayyid adopts the fight which was then raging in Europe and tried to utilise the new method in the defence of his own religion in India which was brought face to face with the disintegrating forces of Western culture for the first time.

Pressed hard by the spread of Rationalism and stung deeply by the scathing enquiries of the Christian missionaries and European Orientalists, our foremost thinker sat down to expound his theory of 'Modern Islam' which formed a basis of reconstruction of religious thought in modern times.

Of all the works of Sir Sayyid, the *Khutabāt* has appealed most to his co-religionists. The reason is obvious. It is a rejoinder to Sir William Muir's *Life of Mahomet*, and a reasoned defence of the life and teachings of the Holy Prophet of Islam. When Sir William first wrote his *Life of Mahomet*, it created great consternation among the Muslims. The book was compiled according to the modern methods of research and his criticism of the sources of the life of the Holy Prophet had much originality and appeal.

Although a subordinate official of Sir William Muir's Government nothing could deter Sir Sayyid from an examination and criticism of the material



utilised by the former in his work. He was however fully conscious of the difficulties of accomplishing such a task in India where materials were scanty and the atmosphere hardly favourable. It was mainly for this object that he made a journey to England where he collected data for his book and got into touch with all distinguished men and personalities who could be of any help to him in the compilation of his work.

So keen was the interest of Sir Sayyid in the compilation of this book that in one of his letters he wrote to Mawlawī Mahdī 'Alī (Muḥsin'ul-Mulk): "I am deeply upset and my heart is in grief nowadays. I am studying the book of Sir William which has agitated me extremely. The prejudices and injustice of his work have injured my heart and I am determined to write a rejoinder to it. Even if I am required to spend the whole of my wealth and property, and am reduced to abject poverty in doing so, I am prepared to make that sacrifice. I have ordered from France, Germany and Egypt, books relating to the biography of the Holy Prophet. Letters have been sent. I have actually bought the *Sirat Ibn-i-Hishām* and some Latin books and have appointed a man to translate Latin passages relevant to my subject." In another letter he wrote :

"I am busy with my book *Mawā'iz-i-Aḥmadiyyah*

(i.e., *Khutabat*) and have no other programme. I have even stopped visiting people. This work has altogether deprived me of essential comforts like eating and sleeping.”

All this anxiety, all this concern and all this absorption show nothing but his sincere devotion and transparent love for the “Hero” of the book, i.e., the Holy Prophet.

The methods followed in this book are modern, His methods, i.e., critical examination of modern and sources of the life of the Holy Prophet, scientific. employment of the results of scientific researches of the scientists in the service of Religion and an attempt to approach the subject from the standpoint of Nature and modern theories of Culture.

Sir Sayyid proved in this book that the only Criticism of infallible authority which is beyond *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh*. scrutiny and objection is that of the Book of Allah. *Ḥadīth* (Tradition) and *Fiqh* (Theories of the Canon Law) must be put to the test of Reason and Natural Laws. He declared that there is nothing against the laws of Nature in the *Qur'an*.

The first chapter of the book is devoted to the Synopsis of Geography of Arabia. The first contents, eleven chapters deal with preliminary subjects of much importance, viz., a criticism of

*Ḥadīth*, *Ka'bah* and its story : geneology of the Holy Prophet : prophecies in the Old and the New Testaments about the advent of the Holy Prophet ; an examination of the story of '*Shaqq-i-Ṣadr*' and '*Mirāj*' (including a discussion of the miracles). The life of the Prophet upto his twelfth year is given in the 12th chapter.

In all these discussions a tendency towards  
 Sir Sayyid's advocacy of Reason. 'Rationalism' is manifest. The views on miracles which he expressed at much length in his *Tafsīr*, show the dominating influence of Reason on his mind which rejected the supernatural and declared it something foreign to the spirit of true religion.

He has also touched the question of polygamy with regard to which he holds that it is a natural necessity of man and is absolutely in accord with the laws of Nature. 'Nature' is the foundation on which he bases his arguments throughout.

The *Khutabāt* conclusively prove that the Holy Prophet was a descendant of Ismā'il and not of Ishāq as is argued by Sir William in his book. He shows remarkable acquaintance with the *Ansāb* in this chapter.

Although Sir Sayyid approached his subject in a scientific manner, he was not always critical. His emphasis on Reason makes him, sometimes, a

materialist of the deepest dye and he loses sight of the fact that Religion cannot live and survive without some spiritual background enabling it to retain a sense of mystery, in whatever form the spiritual experience is presented.

The *Khutabāt* is an epoch-making book. It has revolutionised the old theories of biography. The book is preceded by an introduction or introductions which seek to furnish a background for the life of the "Hero". The author's treatment of the subject is not polemical and apologetic. The theme is pursued critically and logically. It is not only a biography but a criticism of Muslim Theology as well. Most of the works of Sir Sayyid are not read now but the *Khutabāt* will attract the attention of the reader for long on account of the sincerity and genuineness which its author's outstanding personality has infused into it.

The *Tafsir'ul-Qur'an* which was the latest book written by Sir Sayyid and which was left incomplete when the author died, may be regarded as a collection of the definite ideas and conceptions about Religion in their most evolved and developed form, as investigated and expounded by Sir Sayyid in the light of the then known theories of science and culture.

The whole of this *Tafsir* is based on two guiding principles. Contrary to the established view, Sir Sayyid declared that the sole authority for determining the principles of Faith or Religion is the *Qur'an* and all else is subsidiary and of secondary importance. The idea that Islam is composed of the *Qur'an*, the *Hadith*, the *Ijma'* and the *Qiyas*, is declared by Sir Sayyid as un-Islamic.

The second principle which is of far more importance is that the truth of every doctrine or view must be tested on the touch-stone of Reason and the laws of Nature. According to our author, there is nothing in Islam which goes against Reason and Nature and the points which appear to be so, can be reconciled with the established scientific truths.

Sir Sayyid wrote his commentary of the Holy *Qur'an* on these lines and investigated the soundness of every dogma in the light of the above basic principles. He referred to the 'Mu'tazilites' of early Islam only when he found support from them. He did not follow them blindly but rejected or accepted their views on the basis of his own "independent" judgment.

The most vital problems discussed in the *Tafsir* have been enumerated above. He  
 Religious wars. violently criticised the idea of *Jihād* of an aggressive nature, so commonly prevalent among the Muslims. According to him, all the wars fought by the Prophet of Islam were defensive and there is no injunction in the Holy Qur'an favouring the popular view of *Jihād*.

Slavery, according to him, had been totally  
 Slavery, etc. abolished by Islam. There was no *Mi'raj* (or Ascension) of the Holy Prophet with *his* body and flesh but it was a spiritual experience only. There are no species such as the *Jinn* and the angels apart from their being symbols of Natural Powers. Miracles and other supernatural happenings cannot take place and such events as are mentioned in the Holy Qur'an have got an allegorical significance requiring rational interpretation.

Islam, according to him, is a Religion of Nature  
 Islam a religion of Nature. and suits all conditions and phases of human society. It is the best of all religions.

This is, in a nutshell, the gist of what Sir Sayyid  
 Sir Sayyid's influence on the Ulema. thought and wrote. Much criticism has been levelled against him by contemporary theologians, and it was an anathema to be

associated with him during his life-time. The theologians attacked him with old weapons and he was dubbed a *Kāfir*. Although we witness a storm of opposition raging against him during his life-time yet no one will deny that his influence on the religious side was profound. His views have not only been accepted by the Muslim intelligentsia but have even penetrated into the minds of the orthodox 'Ulema' who were for so long his bitter opponents.

It must, however, be made clear that there was one great weakness in the position taken up by Sir Sayyid who based most of his conceptions on the theories of Science which are liable to change in the light of new data. The trend of some of the most distinguished scientists such as Sir Arthur Eddington and Sir James Jeans has become thoroughly spiritualistic and the inadequacy of Reason has been proved by Bergson and others. Among the modern Muslim thinkers, Sir Muḥammad Iqbāl has very much negatived the influence of Sir Sayyid and has vehemently attacked the materialistic attitude adopted by the author of the *Tafsīr'ul-Qur'an* and his followers.

Sir Sayyid may not be a great author himself but his influence over the current ideas, spirit and form of literature was tremendous as also on the attitude of the

Muslims in social and political matters. Although he was a man of varied activities and diverse tastes, his main occupation in life was the creation of an interest in Religion only (Politics to him being a hand-maid of Religion). He tried to harmonise Dogmatic Theology with Reason. It would, therefore, be interesting to investigate into the results which he achieved in his life-time in the form of abstract ideas which he sought to infuse in the minds of his contemporaries and to trace the main undercurrent of thought which runs through all of his books.

It may be repeated here that his principal aim  
 Revival of Islamic Society.      was to revive the Islamic Society  
    on modern lines on the basis of a  
 Religion fully compatible with the spirit of progress. He, therefore, endeavoured to discover scientific truths in the *Qur'an* and proved to some extent that the Scriptures and the Physical Sciences are not inimical to one another. "In no phase of Indian Muslim life," says M. T. Titus,<sup>1</sup> "has contact with the West produced a more marked change than in the realm of religious thought." The same author remarks that "the change consists in a new attitude

1. M. T. Titus, *Indian Islam* (1930), p. 207.



of mind rather than in a new system of thought." Although the above opinion is partially true it can, on no account, be denied that this change of ideas not only influenced the life of the people but also gave a new direction to the current of thought running through the mass of literature produced in those days.

Some of the problems to which Sir Sayyid and his followers paid their attention were: Problems in which Sir Sayyid and his followers were interested, an attempt to offer a scientific interpretation of Islam; a new emphasis on the personality of the Holy Prophet; the doctrine of Abrogation (*Nasikh Mansukh*); Islam a Religion of Peace; position of Woman in Islam; a criticism of the fundamental principles of *Hadith* and Jurisprudence; Islam not detrimental to progress; civilisation and higher education; slavery forbidden by Islam; Islam's capacity of moulding itself according to the environments and social conditions, etc. These and other problems swayed the minds of all the leaders of the 'Aligarh movement and a discussion of these may be seen through the lines of each and every book written during this period.

It is not easy to judge what tremendous influence Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān exerted on Literature and how he entirely

Influence of Sir Sayyid :  
(ii) Spirit.

changed its spirit. We are not concerned with the world of politics and other realms of activity of that eminent man here. We shall only discuss Literature. It was through the initiative of Sir Sayyid Ahmad that the element of 'sincerity' was introduced into Urdu literature and conventionalism was rejected. His writings generated a spirit of freedom, gave birth to a craving for inquiry and search for truth and stimulated a desire for progress. Not only was the substance of literature transmuted, its form and style also underwent a profound change.

Sir Sayyid was a practical man and had no time for speculation. He preferred to write in a matter-of-fact and businessman-like style not caring much for the imagery of words and other beauties of form. He was, as Joseph Conrad remarks about himself, "the most unliterary of all the literary men." His main object was to give free and unrestrained expression to his feelings, no matter in what form and in what kind of language and style. His writings are free from artificiality and make-up. He is thoroughly sincere and true and this quality is sufficiently reflected in the style which he employed in his writings. No doubt, his style is too simple and prosaic to be successfully copied by any one, still it had the salutary effect of introducing a spirit of

reality and naturalness into Urdu. He has influenced the style of Hālī, Wahīd'ud-Dīn Salīm and a few others and the virtues of genuineness, earnestness and straightforwardness which are the characteristics of modern Urdu writers in general and the immediate successors and friends of Sir Sayyid, in particular, have certainly been bestowed upon literature through the wide influence of the *Tahzīb'ul-Akhlaq*, which also emphasised the urgent need of assimilating in Urdu what is good in other languages, not excluding even the scientific terms of technical nature.<sup>1</sup> Sir Sayyid was conscious of the danger that "when a language gets exclusive or limited in range, it is considered a dead language."

Sir Sayyid was chiefly concerned with Religion Urdu prose and Politics but the interest which enriched. he created for modern ideas was surely a powerful incentive to the writers of Urdu who attempted books on Biography, History, Fiction, Criticism, etc., and adopted therein Western methods of approaching their problems. The *Tahzīb'ul-Akhlaq* encouraged younger writers and cultivated a taste for social and literary criticism. In short, it was Sir Sayyid who gave a truly literary colour to Urdu literature which was absolutely lacking

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1. *Tahzīb'ul-Akhlaq* (Lahore, 1896), V. I. p. 490.

in the books written before this period.

So great was the prejudice of the Muslims against Western ideas that it could  
Summary.

be safely assumed that had there been no Sir Sayyid, the process of assimilating new ideas and new spirit would have been very slow. Sir Sayyid, through his undaunted courage, his unbending will and his dynamic personality, brought about a revolution. "Seldom in the history of the world in modern times," says Dr. Laṭīf,<sup>1</sup> "has any country been exposed to such a sudden and lurid glare of vitalising ideas and conceptions. The nearest approach to this is, perhaps, the Renaissance in Europe .....". He was a staunch critic of society. He introduced the elements of humour and higher criticism in Urdu literature. He was a sincere believer in matter rather than in manner, in action rather than in words. He had a vigorous style of writing, the chief features of which were force, simplicity, earnestness and disregard for artificial beauty as opposed to truth. He was an eloquent speaker—one of those orators "who take the heaven by storm."

It should, however, be borne in mind that his main strength lay in his personal magnetism rather than in the charm of his style of writing. He was

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1. S. A. Laṭīf: *The influence of English Literature on Urdu Literature* (London, 1924), p. 43.

like Chaucer the “master of both the halves of culture—world of books and world of men”, yet the latter half seems to be his special estate. The great literary personalities, whose account follows, were influenced not only by his books but by the force of his exuberant personality. He was one of the greatest men (if not the greatest man) of the century. Surely, he was “the tallest tree in the garden” of Indian Islam.

## II

# THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGIANS



## II

### THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGIANS

SIR SAYYID was the exponent of a new Religious Philosophy, the chief distinctive features of which have already been discussed above. It was in this type of Theology that his immediate friends and contemporaries were influenced the most.

Among the band of writers, who came under his influence, there were some who were much more learned than him and had much more erudition, particularly in the domain of Religion and Islamic Sciences. But the fact remains that their source of inspiration lay in the writings of their eminent guide and inspirer who was the greatest figure among them all. It is, however, true that some of his younger friends and followers revolted against his influence and the reaction, discerned in their books, may be



due to their old training or to their want of penetration into the spirit of European culture or because of the lack of moral courage in taking up a stand against the popular orthodox view.

These writers on theological subjects were The "School of Chirāgh 'Alī, Muḥsin'ul-Mulk, Shiblī, Sir Sayyid." Nazīr Aḥmad and a few other second-rate men. Of these, the first two were the 'Naturalists' of the deepest dye and were staunch adherents of their 'master.' The other two, while largely influenced by Sir Sayyid, had their differences and doubts, as we shall see, in the following pages.

### 1. *Nawwāb Muḥsin'ul-Mulk*

Sayyid Maḥdī 'Alī was born in 1837 A.D. in a Shī'ah family of Etāwah. His early views, education was limited and in strict accordance with the old Shī'ah traditions. Soon after his appointment to a subordinate position of a clerk in the office of the Collector of Revenues, he abandoned Shī'ism for the Sunnī creed and as a result, wrote a small treatise on the superiority of Sunniism, under the title of *Āyāt-i-Bayyināt*.

The Mutiny came in 1857 A.D., and Sayyid His life and career, Maḥdī 'Alī was in a position to render some service to the Government, as a

reward for which he became a *Sarishtadār*. From this inferior position, he rose, through sheer ability and grit, to the post of a Deputy Collector. In 1874 A.D., his services were lent to the Hyderabad State where he achieved great success as a servant of the State and filled important posts of honour and trust. He was awarded the title of *Muḥsin'ud-Dawlah Muḥsin'ul-Mulk*. After his retirement from Hyderabad in 1893 A. D., he joined hands with Sir Sayyid in the educational programme of the latter and became the secretary of the M.A.-O. College, 'Aligarh, in 1899 A. D., a year after the death of its founder. He died at Simla in 1907 A. D.

The first meeting of *Muḥsin'ul-Mulk* with Sir Sayyid took place when the former was the *Tahsildār* of Etawah and the contact developed into admiration and affection. Sir Sayyid's regard for him was so great that he called *Muḥsin'ul-Mulk* his "body and flesh" and used to address him as "the dearest one" in his letters.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this mutual affection and regard were many but the most powerful of all was the almost complete unanimity of opinion with Sir Sayyid who could count on his help even in the most embarrassing situations. He became a member of the

1. *Ḥayāt-i-Muḥsin* by Muḥammad Amin Zubayri (1934), pp. 213-14.

Scientific Society in 1864 A.D. and worked for its advancement with remarkable zeal and enthusiasm. Sir Sayyid used to seek his advice and assistance in the compilation of the *Khutabat* and Mawlawī Mahdī 'Alī (Muḥsin'ul-Mulk) was always prepared to help Sir Sayyid. But his chief work is embodied in the volumes of the *Tahzīb'ul-Akhlāq*, in the preparation of which he took a leading part. His articles in the said journal may be said to be some of the best essays ever written in Urdu on the topics to which these critics of the 19th Century had devoted themselves. The fame of *Tahzīb'ul-Akhlāq* owes a great deal to the energy and work of this prominent essayist and his sound advocacy of the mission of Sir Sayyid can never be ignored. He was, indeed, a great source of strength to the founder of the movement.

His chief books are :

His works and their value. 1. *Essays of Muḥsin'ul-Mulk* collected from the *Tahzīb'ul-Akhlāq*.

2. *Speeches of Muḥsin'ul-Mulk*.
3. *Taqlid wa 'amal bi'l-Ḥadīth*.
4. *Kitāb'ul-Maḥabbat wash-Shawq*.
5. *Letters of Muḥsin'ul-Mulk*.
6. *Musalmānoḥ ki Tahzīb*.
7. *Āyāt-i-Bayyināt*.

These works are not remarkable for their originality and cannot be said to possess any permanent

value. In substance and in spirit, they have the same trend as the books of Sir Sayyid himself.

A collection of letters,<sup>1</sup> exchanged between Sir Sayyid and Muḥsin'ul-Mulk has recently been published, a study of which shows that the latter differed largely from Sir Sayyid on many points but, as a matter of fact, he had so completely identified himself with the views and opinions of the latter in general that it would be hardly possible to ascribe to him any original contribution to Thought.

His correspondence with Sir Sayyid.

## 2. *Chirāgh 'Alī*

We have already made a reference to the spread of religious controversy and inquiry of faith in India during the first part of the 19th Century. In these 'battles,' the advocates of all religions and sects freely participated.

Like many other writers of this period, Mawlawī Chirāgh 'Alī was keenly interested in these discussions before he came into contact with Sir Sayyid and had deeply felt the need of defending Islam against the criticisms of Christian missionaries. Chirāgh 'Alī

Chirāgh 'Alī interested in religious controversy.

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1. This collection is called *Mukātabāt'ul-Khullān* (Correspondence of the Friends).

wrote a *Rejoinder to the Ta'rikh-i-Muhammadi* of Imām'ud-Dīn, a Christian missionary who had cast aspersions on the character of the Holy Prophet. This book is called the *Ta'liqat*. Chirāgh 'Alī also helped Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad of Qādiān in the compilation of the *Barahin-i-Aḥmadiyyah*.

With this religious tendency, Chirāgh 'Alī was at once attracted by the magnetism of Sir Sayyid attracts him. of Sir Sayyid's impressive and stately figure and by the force which his methods of defence of religion carried with them. The unity of taste and interest brought them together and cemented their relations till the end, to the great advantage of the work, which Sir Sayyid had laid before himself.

Chirāgh 'Alī was a Kāshmirī by birth and his ancestors belonged to the Punjab. His life and service. His father, Mawlawī Muḥammad Bakhsh, was an inhabitant of Meerut where he died in 1856 A.D., after he had served the Government for some time. His eldest son, Chirāgh 'Alī, was still young. All chances of good education having been lost to the boy, he acquired a smattering of English and a fair knowledge of Urdu and Persian. With this literary attainment, he got a petty job in the beginning but rose gradually to higher and still higher positions, owing to his labour, industry and honesty. He was offered a high post in the Hyder-

abad State—the home of all the outstanding personalities of the day from which he retired in the capacity of a Şubahdār. He died in 1895 A.D.<sup>1</sup>

Chirāgh 'Alī was a versatile scholar and an able linguist. He was well-versed in Hebrew, Chaldean and Latin. As has already been said, his knowledge of English was very limited but his constant touch with the English language and literature made him the master of style so much so that his articles in English were highly appreciated by scholars and critics of that language.

He wrote comparatively little in Urdu and his eminence and reputation mostly rest on his English books such as the *Critical Exposition of the Popular Jihād; Reforms under Moslem Rule and Moḥammad; the True Prophet*.

His Urdu books are few and of no outstanding merit. They are the *Ta'liqat* (al-Urdu books. ready mentioned above), *Islām kī Dunyawī Barkateṁ*; *Qadīm Qawmon kī Tā'rīkh*; *Bibī Hājarah*; *Bibī Māriyah Qibṭiyyah*; *Ta'liq Niyāz Nāmah* and *Rasā'il-i-Chirāgh 'Alī*, published after the death of the author. Some of these were

1. For details of his life, see *A'zam'ul-Kalām fī Irtiqā'il-Islām*. Introduction by M. 'Abd'ul-Ḥaqq.

collected from the *Tahzib'ul-Akhlaq*, to which the Mawlawi frequently contributed. Chiragh 'Ali was engaged, before he died, in writing a book which sought to illustrate the compatibility of Islam with modern sciences.

Chiragh 'Ali was a great thinker and an original Chiragh 'Ali as a writer. His power of argument and force of exposition made him an important figure among the friends of Sir Sayyid. His articles had the effect of impressing and convincing the reader. His versatility and vast knowledge of ideas, Oriental and Occidental, earned for him a considerably high position. He was a great controversialist and could frequently vanquish his opponent with the latter's own weapons.

Chiragh 'Ali was interested in all the problems to which Sir Sayyid and his friends were devoting their attention. In *Tahqiq'ul-Jihad*, which is the translation of his English work *An Exposition of the Popular Jihad*, he, with his exemplary force of argument, refuted the popular Muslim view of 'religious wars' in Islam. He believed strongly that there was no compulsion in the matter of faith and that Islam was a peaceful religion. Like Sir Sayyid, he did not admit that Islam ever allowed 'slavery' which had in their opinion been totally abolished by the Prophet.

In the *A'zam'ul-Kalām* (which is the translation of his *Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms under the Muslim Rule*), the author endeavoured to refute the allegation that Islam is not consistent with modern civilised conditions and is detrimental to progress. He considered the problem from an international and political point of view and proved that Islam has elevated the position of Man, Woman and Nations, individually and collectively. In this book, he profusely quoted from the Bible and frequently instituted comparisons with the Holy Qur'an.

It is, however, an unfortunate fact that he wrote His articles in the in Urdu very rarely. His views were *Tahzib'ul-Akhlaq*. in complete accord with those of Sir Sayyid, at whose request he often wrote articles in the *Tahzib'ul-Akhlaq*. Chirāgh 'Alī is less known among the writers of this period, firstly, because he expressed himself mostly in English and secondly because he could not make any original contribution to the existing stock of ideas already introduced by Sir Sayyid.

### 3. *Nazir Ahmad*

Nazir Ahmad and Shiblī were both influenced by Sir Sayyid and his thought. They contributed



largely to religious literature of the period. But, by temperament, they were very different from the great man and their attitude towards the problems of faith represents a mild reaction against their leader's 'free thinking.' The revolt of Shibli, however, was much more pronounced and stronger than that of Nazir Ahmad who lacked that originality and independence of thought which gave distinction to the works of Shibli Nu'mani.

Nazir Ahmad whose biographical sketch will Pre-eminently a appear in the section dealing with novelist. the Novel, was primarily a novelist. But according to the old practice, he took interest in other subjects as well and considerably enriched the store of Urdu literature.

Nazir Ahmad was a student of the Delhi College which has the distinction of producing Nazir Ahmad a student of the eminent men like Zakā'ullah, and Delhi College. Muḥammad Husayn Azād. He began his education in a mosque at Delhi. From the very beginning Nazir Ahmad exhibited indifference to the narrow sectarianism of the period and did not worry about the parochial Wahhābī-Sunnī controversy which was raging furiously in those days. The Delhi College and its catholic atmosphere fostered in him the spirit of toleration and inquiry.

Nazir Ahmad is chiefly known, in the realm of Theology, for his comprehensive work on Islām, *Al-Huquq w'al-Fara'id* and his *Translation of the Holy Qur'an*. A few small treatises were also written by him but the *Huquq* alone embodies all what he stands for.

Like Sir Sayyid, Nazir Ahmad was dubbed as a 'Naturalist' in spite of his repeated declarations that he dissented from, and did not see eye to eye with the former in many points. Yet, his advocacy of Reason, his strong support to the educational programme of the founder of the M. A.-O. College, 'Aligarh, and last but by no means the least, his modern methods of approach to religious subjects, were no insignificant characteristics to be silently overlooked by adversaries of the new movement.

His *Translation of the Qur'an* is the first Urdu version of the Holy Book in modern prose, though, there already existed translations of Shah 'Abd'ul-Qadir and Shah Rafi'ud-Din. The language of these two earlier versions was, however, old and metrical and did not possess that dignity and charm which suit the Divine Book. Nazir Ahmad wrote idiomatic Urdu, spoken in Delhi, the fountain-head of pure and unmixed expression. It has, however, been said that Nazir Ahmad

was not able to maintain the dignity of language necessary for such a work and used vulgar expressions at some places which marred the beauty and grace of his translation. Still, it is a fact that, his translation gained so much popularity that none other could compete with it. Even to-day it can be regarded as one of the best and the most popular version.

The *Huqūq w'al-Farā'id* is in three volumes. It is written in simple but dignified Urdu. In it, Nazir Ahmad discusses comprehensively the tenets, beliefs, social, moral and political regulations (obligatory and optional) which govern the life of a Muslim. The general trend of thought in this book is consistent with the fundamentals of Sir Sayyid school of reform in so far as it insists on the application of reason to faith and aims at creating a rational outlook in religious matters. The treatment of the subject is, however, somewhat conventional. The author follows Shāh Walī'ullah who was a lofty figure among the Scholastic theologians of Islām. At times, he recedes into the old preserves of orthodoxy, ostensibly, for washing away the stigma of 'Naturalism'—a term of reproach from which all the literary men of this period tried to escape. But with respect to the salient points of Sir Sayyid's teaching, Nazir Ahmad yielded to none in supporting them with zeal and enthusiasm.

Nazīr Aḥmad paid particular attention towards  
 His views on bringing about a change in the atti-  
 Fatalism, tude of his co-religionists with regard  
 to Fatalism, but at the same time, did not believe in  
 the unrestrained freedom of man.

Like all others, he was very much anxious about  
 The rights of non- inter-religious harmony and took  
 Muslims, pains to show that Islām advises  
 its followers to be on friendly relations with non-  
 Muslims, especially the English people, who are  
 Christians.

As regards 'religious wars,' Nazīr Aḥmad held  
 Religious wars the same views as were held by the  
 rest of his friends. He did not regard  
*Jihād* a part of Islamic doctrines and, because of  
 this, he devoted no special section to *Jihād* in his  
*Ḥuqūq w'al-Farā'id*. "The conditions, necessitating  
 such a war," says Nazīr Aḥmad, "do not exist under  
 the British Government."<sup>1</sup>

His attitude towards supernatural matters was  
 Miracles, somewhat different from that of Sir  
 Sayyid. He believed in the super-  
 natural happenings and miracles. The invisible  
 species, viz., the *Jinn*, and the angels do exist, as is  
 laid down in the Holy Qur'an.

1. *Ḥuqūq w'al-Farā'id*, vol. 3, p. 17.

He thought that the imparting of English education to Muslims on Western lines was not only a political necessity but also a religious duty. The study of Science and Metaphysics, according to him, was obligatory, because it could be effectively employed in the service of Religion.

In spite of these moderate views, he was not looked upon with favour by the orthodox class. One of his books, the *Ummahāt'ul-Ummah* was burnt in public, as, according to his opponents, it contained material which was disrespectful to the Holy Prophet and his holy wives.

Faith, according to Nazir Ahmad, is something born out of Nature and there is no inherent disagreement between the Faith and Reason. Similarly, Religion and Science are not in conflict; only an accurate interpretation and thorough understanding of Reality are required.

Nazir Ahmad's theological works, excepting the *Translation of the Qur'an*, are not popular. The reason for this may probably be that his arrangement of these books as well as the style of writing employed in these works is not very attractive. It is dull, monotonous and devoid of literary grace. Hence they are rarely read as compared with Shibli's powerful

writings on these very subjects.

#### 4. *Shibli Nu'mānī*

Shibli Nu'mānī excelled in History and Historical Biography and would be discussed fully among the historians and biographers. But as he was a man of varied interests and his contribution to religious thought is admittedly important, he also deserves a high place among the Theologians of this period. He was a great thinker, gifted with powers of observation and insight into the working of the human mind. Next to Sir Sayyid, Shibli was the only scholar who left a deep and abiding impression on the minds of young men of his time and succeeded in moulding their thoughts along new lines.

His early education, which was not very liberal, created in him a strong prejudice against the Wahhābī Sect. He hated the Wahhābīs so intensely that in his estimation, they were worthy of contempt even more than the non-believers. His bitter feelings against this sect have found full expression in an Arabic book, the *Iskāt'ul-Mu'tadī*, in which early influences are at work in their most intense form. This was, perhaps, the lowest ebb of his religious

sectarianism, from which he gradually lifted himself till he was swept away by the rushing tide of 'Naturalism' or 'Rationalism' which gave a different colour to his views and conceptions.

But a strict Hanafite as he was, Shibli could not afford to be altogether impervious to the new ideas which were in the air during those days. That he was clearly in favour of modern education through the medium of English, is proved by the fact that he took his brother Mahdī to the M. A.-O. College, 'Aligarh, for admission, where first of all, he came into contact with 'the great man' of his age whose penetrating eyes captivated the young theologian's heart and whose talk bewitched him. Shibli was spell-bound. What happened afterwards? We shall discuss it fully in another place. But, to put it briefly, he was introduced to a new realm of thought—the realm of European methods of research and enquiry, the realm of European philosophy and science, which opened up new vistas of work and knowledge before him and admitted the inquisitive young scholar to the Assembly of the Neo-Mu'tazilites (the modern advocates of Reason.)

Sir Sayyid offered him a post in the College and Shibli readily accepted it. After  
 His intimacy with Sir Sayyid      this, we find him engaged in lengthy

discussions on diverse subjects with Sir Sayyid who always searched the minds of his colleagues about his own problems, and this association and constant discussion resulted in giving a new direction to the inclinations of Shibli. He had still another opportunity of acquainting himself with what Europe thought and did through the presence of Dr. T. W. Arnold in the College who gave Shibli lessons in French. As long as the great leader lived, Shibli remained on the staff of the M. A.-O. College and left it only after the death of Sir Sayyid.

Shibli was a genius. He had an ambitious programme of reviving all Islamic sciences including the Scholastic Theology, of which we have a parallel in the early 'Abbasid period. The conditions were almost identical. The 'Abbasid period had witnessed the conflict of Greek philosophy and Free Thought with Islām; now European sciences were in conflict with Religion. The divines of early Islām had devised a means for combating the evils of Free Thought: a similar weapon was even, at present, essential. Sir Sayyid had set the ball rolling; but Shibli wanted to evolve a new system, because, Sir Sayyid, he thought, was badly cut off from the Islamic background and it was this ignorance which



had caused the failure of his mission.

Such was the plan of Shiblī. He designed to reconstruct the whole religious thought of Islām. But he never succeeded in it owing to his deep interest in his other scheme of writing the biographies of "Great Men." Like Carlyle, he thought that History is nothing but a connected story of "Great Men."

The important works which made Shiblī memorable in Theology and will always keep his name a living force, are the *'Ilm'ul-Kalām*, *Al-Kalām*, *Al-Ghazzālī* and the *Life of Mawlānā Rūm*, the last two being the biographies of two great personalities in the world of Mysticism and Religion. These two will be taken up for discussion in the section on Biography.

The *'Ilm'ul-Kalām* is a history of Muslim Philosophy or Scholastic Theology. "*'Ilm'ul-Kalām*. "Since long, I had an idea," says Shiblī, "to reconstruct the religious thought of Islām in the light of new philosophy and on new lines suited to the taste of the moderns; but before undertaking such a work, a history of *'Ilm-i-Kalām* appears to be essential."<sup>1</sup> It has already been remarked that Shiblī insisted on fidelity to the principles laid down

1. *'Ilm'ul-Kalām*, p. 4.

by the ancients and tried never to depart from them.

Shiblī particularly insisted on the 'idea of causation'. He applied it not only to History proper but worked it out everywhere. Why, he questions, were there so many sects in Islām? He traces the causes of this, one of which was the dominating influence of Politics over Thought.

In the '*Ilm'ul-Kalām*', Shiblī has given an answer to those who asserted that the study and teaching of Philosophy was forbidden by Islām. The problem had been disturbing the minds of religious-minded men for centuries and the attitude of those who were opposed to Philosophy, had been utilised by critics that Islām was against all philosophical thought and forbade high thinking. Shiblī demonstrated, with all the force and power of expression at his command, that men like Al-Ghazzālī and Mawlānā Rūm were well-versed in Philosophy and were strongly in favour of its study.

Of all the Islamic thinkers, Shiblī was an admirer of Imām Ibn-i-Taymiyyah and Shāh Walī'ullah of Delhi. Their thought appealed to him most because they were in favour of blending Reason with Theology,

but it should be remembered that like them he believed that Philosophy was subservient to Religion. He extolled Intuition but did not ex-communicate Reason.

While *'Ilm'ul-Kalām* was only a preliminary work which was intended to serve as a background, the *Al-Kalām* may be said to be the real work of a genius. It is a small book but it embraces everything necessary concerning the new interpretation of Islām.

The distinguishing feature of this work is explained by the author himself in these words :

Why a new Scholastic Theology is required.

“ In the old Scholastic Theology, only beliefs were discussed, because, in those days, the critics of Islām attached more importance to this aspect of Religion than to any other. To-day Religion is judged from several other points of view, particularly from the historical and cultural stand-point, because, according to the Western conception, the merit of a religion can be measured more by its social and legal values than by the set of beliefs professed by its adherents. The Western thinkers hold that the mere existence of polygamy, divorce, slavery and religious warfare in a system is sufficient to impair its beauty and to prove its falsehood. Hence, it is essential to

include these (social, legal and political) aspects in our discussion."<sup>1</sup>

Shiblī did not share the belief that modern sciences can shake the foundation of Religion or Faith which is instinctive and ingrained in the very nature of Man. With all its scepticism and materialism, Europe could not cast off Religion *in toto*. The idea of the supernatural is still predominant in Faith. Islām, according to Shiblī, is the most highly evolved form of religion.

Shiblī considered Reason a sure test of the integrity and soundness of Faith and tries to harmonise the two but he did not believe in the absolute power of Reason which reduces Faith to a mere skeleton of dry-as-dust concepts—concepts, well-thought-out and well-planned by the designer of Reason but altogether divorced from emotional idealism which stimulates pure faith and devotion in the human heart and keeps hope and aspiration alive along with the desire of doing good.

His position about miracles is reasonable and intelligible. He has profusely quoted from the books of modern Western philosophers and has brought the instance of modern

1. *Al-Kalām*, p. 6.

Spiritualists to bear upon the problem in a singular way. The modern Spiritualists believe in spiritualism and its conquests. According to Shibli, the impossible can never happen but that which happens can, at times, be of such a character that it might not be within the access of our common-sense when it happens. The 'cause' rules everywhere but, sometimes, we cannot trace it as it lies hidden in the depths of Nature. This is miracle.

The most difficult problem which absorbed the attention of the religious thinkers of this period was : ' Whether Islām can exist in the face of the present advancement of Science and Civilization ' ? Shibli emphatically replies, "yes"! All the fundamental and essential values required for advancement exist in the code of Islām, namely, equality, fraternity, toleration, self-respect, spirit of democracy, division of labour, progress of human knowledge, harmony of religion with secular interests, emphasis on truth and virtue, rejection of asceticism, regard for human welfare, love of truth; and last but not least, absolute cultural autonomy for religious minorities in a Muslim state in so far as they do not interfere with existing law and order. The Law of Inheritance and the Status of Woman are the two contributions of Islām to Civilization

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which decidedly mark a great improvement on all the previous codes which have governed human society upto this day.

It might have become clear from the above that His differences with Sir Sayyid. Shibli was not on an altogether different ground from Sir Sayyid. But there is one important difference between them and that is this. While Sir Sayyid cut his figure on a European pattern, Shibli utilised the European pattern and changed it into something new. Shibli always spoke as a Muslim. He strengthened the forces of conservatism and orthodoxy, be this his merit or demerit.

He possessed a charming style. His precision, Peculiarities of style and treatment, his brevity and scholarly simplicity of language, mixed with a consummate mastery of his subject and love of generalisation have made him the most widely-read author of the day, and, although he was pre-eminently an Historian, yet his theological works are appreciated and liked even more than those of any other writer of the period. He gave a new turn to the thought of his own and the succeeding generations; and infused a new life into a society which was disturbed mentally and spiritually and which was in quest of certitude. In the course of a

letter he wrote :<sup>1</sup>

“ I am proud that I have got a share in creating this new wave of life and that it was in my lot, as well, to work for bringing about this religious revival.”

1. *Makātib-i-Shiblī*, vol. I, p. 50.

### III

## BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY





### III

## BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

OF all branches of Urdu literature, Biography and History are the two which were deeply influenced by Western methods and conceptions. The vast amount of writing produced in these two branches testifies to their growing hold on educated minds.

The condition of Urdu biography before the spread of Western ideas in India is Old Biography. a subject which is surely relevant to our discussion of New Biography. Urdu language and literature are, in their origin and main structure, the descendants of Persian and Arabic—the two fountain-heads from which most of the ideas, themes, forms and technique other than those imported from the West have been derived. Most of the old biographical literature, which is indeed scanty, has, therefore, been fashioned on the forms

prevalent in Persian and Arabic.

Arabic literature is immensely rich in this Biography in particular respect and possesses Arabic literature. many biographies of great importance and interest, not only from the point of view of material but also from the point of view of artistic beauty and charm. Nevertheless, it cannot be seriously contended that these biographies, judged according to modern standards, are "pure biographies," as the term goes. We admit that the early Arabic literature did aim at truth but it gradually deteriorated, and originality, independence and search for truth gave place to conventionality and artificiality. These biographies were commemorative and had a didactic purpose. The investigation of truth in the case of the lives of the *Muhaddithin* "traditionists" certainly attracts our attention but, unfortunately, the critical methods of investigating truth and the ideal of presenting true portraits which the Arabs knew were rarely adopted by the writers of Persian and Urdu.

Thus, it will not be far from truth to remark Influence of the West. that Biography, in its modern sense, was absent from Urdu literature and it was under the direct influence of the West, which had affected the life and thought of the Muslims through the effective and powerful instru-

mentality of Sir Sayyid, that the 'art' of biography in the realm of Urdu literature was studied and pursued seriously by literary men.

As a matter of fact, the art of biography has only recently attracted the attention of the writers not only in the East but also in the West, and it was after the eighteenth century that biography as a distinct and recognisable art began in England. Nineteenth Century Biography in England. only recently attracted the attention of the writers not only in the East but also in the West, and it was after the eighteenth century that biography as a distinct and recognisable art began in England. "Biography," said Sir Edmond Gosse, "is a faithful portrait of a soul in its adventures through life." Great emphasis was accordingly laid on the true representation of life and facts, and personal bias or moral purpose was declared extremely injurious to a good biography. Biography became an intellectual art and the intrusion of emotion was regarded as being hostile to it. "Of all such emotions," says Mr. Harold Nicholson, "religious earnestness is the most fatal to pure biography."<sup>1</sup> In modern times, Biography has begun to develop along new lines and a preference for psychology and an interest in the more personal side of man and his individuality have become manifest. Biography has grown into a science under the strong influence of Lytton Stratchey.

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1. Harold Nicholson : *The Development of English Biography* (1927), p. 111.

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Our biographers, such as Ḥālī and Shibli, though New Biography not fully conversant with English, in Urdu. were not unaware of these recent developments in biography. We have seen that Sir Sayyid wrote a short biography of the Holy Prophet upto the twelfth year of his life and utilised his knowledge of Western sources in its compilation. But he was not a biographer. He was the founder of a new system of theology and had a set purpose before him. In fact, he never claimed to be a biographer.

That Ḥālī was acquainted with the modern conception of critical biography, is known from the preface to his earliest work on biography, the *Ḥayāt-i-Sa'dī*, in which he enunciated his view of "life-writing" and its condition in Europe. "In modern times, particularly from the 17th century," he said, "European historians have brought the art of biographical writing to a state of perfection, so much so, that, as in History, so in Biography, there has been evolved a science of biography."<sup>1</sup> Shibli had more opportunities of access to European views and thought, as would be made clear in the section devoted to him in this treatise.

1. Translation borrowed from Dr. Laṭīf's *Influence of English Literature on Urdu Literature*, p. 90.

Notwithstanding all this, it seems that their knowledge of Western conceptions and ideals was not perfect and the sources of their information being only second-hand, they were led astray.

During the period under discussion, the output of biographical writing was immense and it can be said that biographies and historical books written in this period form the bulk of our literature, and were, at any rate, the earliest serious books compiled on purely literary lines.

The chief traits of the 'New Biography' may perhaps be enumerated with advantage here. As has already been mentioned, the new biographies were written on the model of European biographies.

The writers claimed to have taken meticulous care to paint both sides of the picture. They aimed at portraying their subject impartially and disinterestedly, so as to allow the reader to have an independent opinion of the 'hero.' Impartiality was emphatically insisted upon, because, as Shibli held, a book of biography should be a genuine replica of the man and not a "book of praise" (*Kitab'ul-Manaqib*). How far Shibli and Halī succeeded in acting upto this precept is a

question which will be discussed later. For the present, we have only to see what was their conception of this branch of literature.

While these writers, under the influence of European methods, had before them a great idea, their biographies suffered from a very grave defect which, when judged from a technical point of view, mars the beauty and merit of their work. They were inspired by Sir Sayyid and their minds were deeply stirred by political events that had taken place before their eyes. They were the right-hand-men of Sir Sayyid in his mission of reviving Islamic society in a new atmosphere, although the latter was not interested in the revivification of the past. They, however, attempted to bring the past into life through the lives of ancient 'heroes' of Islam whose brilliant record of services to literature, religion and politics could serve as an incentive to the existing generation in their struggle to live a more useful life by fostering the progress of culture and by the diffusion of knowledge along modern lines. The basic idea of all these biographies was religious and the motive underlying these was didactic. Just as Biography in the Victorian period sustained a setback in England on account of the intrusion of the element of religious and moral earnestness, so did

the otherwise splendid production of Biography in Urdu suffer owing to the religious earnestness of the writers in this period, the interest in Religion being the key-note of the entire literature of the age.

Attention has already been drawn to the fact that Ḥālī and Shiblī had a limited knowledge of English with the result that on occasions, they were not capable of appreciating European conceptions of Art and Literature. This defect generally handicapped our great authors in judging things in their true perspective. In the preface to the *Ḥayāt-i-Saʿdī*, Ḥālī defines the functions and advantages of biography and includes therein the didactic purpose of biography and its influence on the character and mind of the reader. Ḥālī seems to have borrowed these ideas from Western sources but with no regular and systematic assimilation. It is, however, possible that Ḥālī got his inspiration from his environment which had imbibed these ideas through contact with the West.

The drawback is even more pronounced in the writings of Shiblī, who, though "Heroes" of Shiblī, endowed with superior intellect and originality, had the idea of Islamic supremacy uppermost in his mind and this occasionally led him to underrate the importance of the fundamental



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principles of art. Shibli was undecided at times and we notice in him a lack of generosity in regard to the recognition of what is superior in Europe. For instance, while, on the one hand, he criticised Ḥālī for his partiality in the life of Sir Sayyid and blamed him for omitting deliberately the other (*i.e.*, the dark) side of the picture, on the other hand, he violently attacked the European methods and treatment of Biography. He called them "fallacious", "objectionable" and "dangerous"—adding that "the old (Oriental) practice (of omitting the dark side of human character in a biography) could only be blamed for its reticence, while the modern (European) fashion (of delineating all facts of a personality) is, in fact, harmful and full of deception which is something far from realistic representation."<sup>1</sup>

If the biographical works produced in the period  
 "Pure Bio-                    are judged strictly according to the  
 graphy " not                high standard maintained in England  
 attempted.                during the 18th century—the age  
 when Boswell's *Life of Johnson* was written,—  
 we are afraid, we might not be able to point to a  
 single instance of "pure biography" in Urdu. But,  
 considering that these great scholars, with all their  
 imperfections and drawbacks, achieved what their

1. His Review on *Manāqib-i-'Umar* b. 'Abd'īl 'Aziz,

successors, despite their acquaintance with modern canons of criticism could not achieve, impresses upon our minds the importance of their prodigious work which is almost all that we possess to-day in Urdu literature. Let us, therefore, not judge their writings in a spirit of doctrinaire criticism but join with Ḥālī in his apology that "the time is not yet ripe for writing a critical biography"<sup>1</sup>—a remark which expresses the mind of a biographer of that period who was but a child of the spirit of the age.

Both of these authors—Ḥālī and Shiblī, have enriched Urdu literature with their contributions. Biography was not the only domain of which they were masters. They had many other regions under their sway. Still, Biography was their chief field of action.

Ḥālī was more or less interested in his contemporaries with whom he had personal affiliations, which actuated him to record their lives and perpetuate their memories. He was, however, a man of letters and loved to write biographies of literary men. That shows his real *Pénchant* (or bent of mind).

1. Ḥālī : *Ḥayāt-i-Jāwīd*, p. 8.

Shibli wrote biographies of historical personages —as he was imbued with Carlyle's Shibli's taste for History, Politics and Religion. idea of 'personality' and considered History to be a connected story of 'great men.' He was pre-eminently an historian and attempted Biography according to what is known as the 'life and times' method. Unlike Hālī, he dabbled in politics and held extreme views on political matters. This gave a distinct colour to his works. His interests were dominated by Religion and Scholastic Theology which, in their turn, directed his choice of 'heroes,' divines and scholars like Imām Abū Hanīfah, Imām Ghazzālī and Rūmī.

### 1. *Hālī*

Sayyid Alṭāf Ḥusayn was born in 1837 A.D., at Panīpat—a place where the fate of India was decided more than once. From such an important place rose a man whose activities changed the whole trend of Urdu literature in its varied forms.

Hālī's early education was in accordance with the old tradition and his atmosphere during this period was so much against things Western that when he was at Delhi prosecuting his studies in the orthodox way, "he did not even care to look at the Delhi College."

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In 1857, Delhi was the scene of unprecedented  
His society at Delhi.                      turmoil and everything fell into  
chaos. Ḥālī was an eye-witness to  
all that happened. Although the splendour of the  
capital was almost gone and the cultured society of  
the Mughal times was fast vanishing, a few men  
of culture were still living, namely, Ghālīb, Zawq,  
Shayftah, Mawlānā Āzurdah, etc., etc., who were  
upholding the old traditions successfully. Ḥālī was  
fortunate enough to enter the circle of these out-  
standing celebrities of the metropolis and was  
influenced, to a great extent, by Shayftah and  
Ghālīb who encouraged him to cultivate his taste  
for poetry.

Although we are not concerned with his poetry  
Influence of                      in this treatise, yet it would not be  
Shayftah.                      out of place to indicate that the ele-  
ments of simplicity and realism in his verse were the  
outcome of his association with Shayftah.

His study of Arabic also exerted a considerable  
Influence of                      influence on the style of his prose  
Arabic                      and verse, and his tendency towards  
literature.                      realism is due to his study of and  
taste for Arabic literature. At least, in prose, we  
find him frequently quoting Arabic verses and Arabic  
proverbs.

But there was one more event in his career which almost revolutionised his whole scheme of life and diverted the stream of his ideas and thoughts into a distinctly new channel. This memorable event was his first meeting with Sir Sayyid which took place at 'Aligarh where he had gone in company with Nawwāb Muṣṭafā Khān of Jahāngīrābād to attend a meeting of the Scientific Society.

Immediately after the Mutiny of 1857 A.D. when all the social and literary gatherings of Delhi had disappeared, Ḥālī at Lahore after 1857. migrated from his home in search of employment and found service in the Education Department at Lahore. Both Ḥālī and Āzād were engaged in reviewing Urdu translations of the standard English authors under the direction of Col. W. R. N. Holroyd. In 1874, the Anjuman-i-Panjāb, Lahore, at the instance of this English officer started the "Mushā'irah" (poetic symposium) which gave birth to a new form of poetry, much on the lines of English poetry. It was, here, that Ḥālī found chances of acquiring fresh ideas from Western books and of utilising new theories. This period, undoubtedly, left an indelible impression on the mind of our poet and the impression was further intensified by his coming under the influence of Sir Sayyid.

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Ḥālī's stay at Lahore was very fruitful for literature but not so for his health which went on deteriorating gradually until he secured a job in the Anglo-Arabic High School, and returned to Delhi as a teacher and remained there till his retirement. This was the period of his close contact with Sir Sayyid who had won the sympathy of the poet and had enlisted his support in the service of his movement for the educational and social uplift of the Muslims. It was at the instance of Sir Sayyid that Ḥālī wrote the epoch-making *Musaddas* which at once set the seal of immortality on his name as a poet.

How much Ḥālī loved and adored Sir Sayyid, is demonstrated by an impressive and fascinating passage in his preface to the *Musaddas* where he quotes the following verse, alluding therein to Sir Sayyid :

آں دل کہ رم نمودے از خو برو جوانان  
دیرینه سال پیرے بردش بیک نگاہ

Throughout his life, Ḥālī remained intimately connected with the 'Aligarh Movement to which he dedicated many of his poems. He died in 1914.

As has been the case with so many others, Ḥālī began his literary career as a prose-writer in 1867 with a treatise called *Tiryāq-i-Masmūm* in refutation of a treatise written

by a Christian missionary of his own native place. He wrote two more books at Lahore, namely, the *Ṭabaqāt'ul-Arz*, (a translation of an Arabic rendering of a French book on geology) and the *Majālis'un-Nisa*, on female education, in the form of a story which has some defects from the technical point of view.

Ḥālī's real work in prose was, however, done at Delhi where he wrote the *Ḥayāt-i-Ḥālī's chief contribution.* *i-Sa'di*, *Yadgar-i-Ghalib*, *Ḥayāt-i-Jawid* and the *Muqaddimah Shi'r wa Sha'iri*. The first three of these works will be dealt with in this section and the last one in the chapter on Literary Criticism. Ḥālī wrote a few more treatises in Persian and Urdu but his contributions to the "Tahzīb'ul-Akhlaq" are by far the most important of all. The *Maqalat* of Ḥālī has recently been published by the Anjuman-i-Taraqqī-i-Urdu (1934).

We have already said above something regarding the conception of Biography in this period. A few more lines may be added with particular reference to Ḥālī. It may be said at the outset that Ḥālī's biographies have a commemorative element in them and are written with a definite purpose, religious and political. Ḥālī has stated his view of Biography in the prefaces to all the three books, in which he aims at furnishing

“a lesson”<sup>1</sup> to the decadent society of his time. His object in writing the *Yadgar-i-Ghālib* was not merely to give a true picture of the poet but mainly to “record such witty sayings of the poet as might create a mood of cheerfulness in the nation.”<sup>2</sup> As regards *Hayāt-i-Jawīd*, none will deny that the impetus of writing such a book was mainly received, not from his love of art or literature, but from his love of the man, Sir Sayyid, and from the veneration in which he held him. The object, in each case was, therefore, commemorative.

Ḥālī laid much emphasis on the critical side of a biography in the preface to *Hayāt-i-Jawīd*. “Time is not yet ripe,” wrote he “for writing a critical biography in India where the weaknesses of a ‘hero’, if stated, wipe away the excellent features of his character; and, though we have deliberately avoided the critical method in the previous books, yet it is proper to introduce this critical element in the Life of Sir Sayyid.” Thus, it is clear, that Ḥālī aimed at truthful and realistic delineation of the subject of his biography.

The life of Sa’dī was the first attempt of Ḥālī at biography-writing which indicated his taste for Persian poetry and his

*Hayāt-i-Sa’dī*,

1. *Hayāt-i-Sa’dī* (1888), p. 4.

2. *Yadgar-i-Ghālib*, p. 7.



admiration for Sa'di—the tuneful lark of Shīrāz. In undertaking such a work, Ḥālī was only animated by a literary spirit of consciously interpreting the past in the terms of modern knowledge.

It may be remembered that Ḥālī's selection of his subject is significant because the biographer has many points in common with his 'hero' in different phases of character as well as in literary tendencies. Both Ḥālī and Sa'di were equally gifted in prose and verse and both liked the simple and unrestrained style of writing. While Sa'di declared:

براه تکلف مرو سعدیا اگر صدق داری بیار و بیا  
the Indian Sa'di (Ḥālī) announced:

صنعت پہ ہو فریفتہ عالم اگر تمام  
ہاں سادگی سے اٹیواپنی نہ باز تو

Further, both of them were fortunate enough to enjoy an everlasting fame on the score of small books, one on the *Gulistān* and *Bustān* and the other on the *Musaddas*. In fact, as Walker has aptly remarked, "to do justice to a great man requires a man having some greatness in himself,"<sup>1</sup> Ḥālī was eminently fitted for the task of judging the great Sa'di.

1. Walker : *Victorian Literature*, p. 920.

## BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

As to the construction and selection of details, Distinctive points of this Biography. one must bear in mind that *Hayāt-i-Sa'dī* is a biography of an ancient poet, for which the author had to depend on such material as was available only in ancient memoirs. Ḥālī utilised all these Tazkirahs and also culled information from the works of the poet. This method, though fruitful in certain cases, led him into errors, —the pitfall into which several European biographers of the poet, like Sir Gore Ousley, Masse and others, had fallen. Ḥālī's acknowledgment of Sa'dī's anecdotes as real facts has landed him into many difficulties.

In *Hayāt-i-Sa'dī*, Ḥālī tried to moralise on many points. His views on the decline of the Muslims, his idea of the revival of Islamic society, his emphasis on individual and national freedom, all are reflected in this work in the form of annotations.

Ḥālī has, however, shown literary tact, penetration of observation and sanity of judgment. His views on the decline of the Muslims, his idea of the revival of Islamic society, his emphasis on individual and national freedom, all are reflected in this work in the form of annotations. His love for Sa'dī is great but it has not detracted him from his sound understanding of the man generally. On the other hand, Ḥālī has been criticised for partiality. The critics allege that he, sometimes, defended the wrong actions of his 'hero'. For instance he did not do full

justice to the Jewish Community when he supported the views of Sa'dī that "a Jew, however wealthy, cannot become a gentleman."

Hālī has depicted Sa'dī as a poet, a moralist and a prose-writer, but he has not treated him as a man—with his failings and excellences. To be brief, Hālī's 'hero' is a superman.

Hālī like other authors, could not fully appreciate the worth of his own work. He declared *Hayāt-i-Sa'dī* to be uncritical as compared with his later works. On the other hand, Shiblī praised the work for its merits and thought that it was one of the best books in the whole range of Urdu literature. Indeed, the paucity of books in Urdu has justified, to some extent, this praise of *Hayāt-i-Sa'dī*. In the sphere of Urdu biography, *Hayāt-i-Sa'dī* occupies a high place.

About the principles of literary criticism laid down in this work, we shall say something later.

Ghālīb was one of those fortunate Indian poets who, though not admitted to fame and appreciation during their lifetime, ascended the pinnacles of reputation and popularity after their death. Like Schopenhauer who had made a will to the effect that the inscription on his tomb should be confined to his mere name as he was confident that he would be known after his death,

Ghālib had foretold that his renown as a great poet would come after his passing away from this world :

شہرت شعرم بگیتی بعد من خواهد شدن !

Hālī was a pupil of Ghālib who had encouraged Hālī's intimacy with Ghālib. him to adopt poetry as his occupation in life. We have many instances of the poet's high esteem and regard for Hālī. It was this feeling of love and affection that stimulated a desire in the mind of Hālī to record a life-sketch of the poet, whose charming humour and original thought were not duly appreciated by contemporary opinion and whose wit, fancy and poetic charm might revive a taste for the true appreciation and evaluation of literature.

In spite of the intimacy and close relation between Hālī and Ghālib, Hālī's judgment is sane and unbiased and though he is not cold like a judge, we cannot say that he is enthusiastic like an advocate.

Many biographies of Ghālib have appeared since *Yadgar-i-Ghālib*, yet no one can deny that it has one great advantage over all others in the matter of priority. "It is true", says Mr. S. M. Ikrām,<sup>1</sup> the learned author of the *Ghālib Nāmāh*, "that the

1. S. M. Ikrām : *Ghālib Nāmāh*, p. 105.

*Yadgār* has been written according to the old methods of writing and contains many flaws, as Dr. Laṭīf has remarked (in his book *Ghālib*), yet no other biography has so far been published which has fewer defects." The *Yadgār* is, by common consent, the earliest and the best biography of the poet so far written. It has been written by a man who knew the poet intimately and from whom no nook or crevice of his life and character was hidden. Like Boswell and Lockart, the secret of Ḥālī's success lay in his powerful observation of the personal traits of his hero.

Ḥālī's greatest virtue, not only in his works, but in all the phases of his life and character, was his unique quality of moderation and judiciousness of outlook coupled with great wisdom. Despite his close ties and intimate relations with *Ghālib* which often tend to create a spirit of partisanship, Ḥālī's opinion was always on the side of moderation. We give only one example. While Dr. Laṭīf, in his small book on *Ghālib*, gives his verdict against the greatness of the poet and closes his book with these words: "He cannot be numbered among the great," Dr. A. R. Bijnourī, another eminent scholar and critic of *Ghālib*, begins his treatise on *Ghālib* (*Maḥasin-i-Kalām-i-Ghālib*) with these words :

” ہندوستان کی الہامی کتابیں دو ہیں۔ مقدس وید اور دیوان غالب۔“

Bijnourī, in this scholarly essay, has compared the poet with the greatest poets of the world and has left the impression that Ghālib was in no way inferior to poets of the West. But Hālī treads on the path of moderation. He has compared the poetical talents of Ghālib with those exhibited in the poetry of Nazirī, Zuhūrī and other Indian and Persian poets, with whom Ghālib was on a common ground. It is true that we might and do find certain points in Ghālib which have an accidental resemblance with the thought of the West but it should never be forgotten that the spirit of Eastern (or Persian) poetry is essentially different from that of the West and “the twain shall never meet.”

It has been remarked by the author of another Trustworthy important book, Ghālib,<sup>1</sup> that “the record of Ghālib’s *Yadgar* with all its merits, is not life. a comprehensive and trustworthy book.” No opinion could be more mistaken than this. We admit that the *Yadgar* has omitted several points of great interest in the life of Ghālib ; but that it has failed to investigate truth and its approach to fact was of a dubious character, cannot be substantiated.

1. M. Ghulām Rasūl Mehr : Ghālib, p. 11.

It is highly significant that Mawlānā Mehr (the author of *Ghālib*) copiously used the *Yadgar* and could not point out more than four or five mistakes in the whole of the book after a thorough examination.

Shiblī<sup>1</sup> spoke very highly of the *Yadgar* and considered it among the best books of Urdu. And, so far as existing literature is concerned, the opinion of Hālī's great contemporary and friend is not far from truth.

Still, it would not be improper to say that the *Yadgar* has not fulfilled the expectations which we might have in view of its author's intimate acquaintance with the poet *Ghālib*. Hālī says,<sup>2</sup> "I could, if I liked, gather a collection of the Poet's witty sayings." It is a misfortune that he did not do so and has deprived us of the information which would have proved of great help and interest to a future biographer.

That he should have given a psychological analysis of the 'man' *Ghālib*, is an expectation which cannot be entertained in the light of the circumstances in which Hālī lived. This aspect of biography which emphasises the examination of the inner per-

Evolution of the  
mind of *Ghālib*  
not given.

1. *Makātib-i-Shiblī*, v. I. p. 318.

2. *Yadgar-i-Ghālib*, p. 68.

sonality and individuality, is a later development. To this Ḥālī made no contribution.

He could, however, give a full-size portrait of Ghālīb which he has not cared to do. He has not even solved the problems of the life of his 'hero' and has, rather, put us in a greater confusion. According to him, Ghālīb acquired knowledge from Mullā 'Abd'uṣ-Ṣamad, whom he owed much of his taste for Persian.<sup>1</sup> But the mystery of his early education remains quite unsolved when we find Ghālīb not acknowledging any debt to the great teacher Mullā 'Abd'uṣ-Ṣamad whose existence seems to be an enigma.

Similarly, Ḥālī has not thrown any light on the problem of Ghālīb's religion, the ultimate cause of his pessimism, his protest against the indifference of his contemporaries to his talents, his stoic unconcern for the changes of political environment, his carelessness with regard to domestic love, his unjustified attacks on the author of *Burhān-i-Qatī'*, and many other problems of first-rate importance to the biography of Ghālīb.

Some of Ḥālī's omissions are really serious; but his achievement is certainly great. Ḥālī's achievement What he has achieved with all his

1. *Yādgar-i-Ghālīb*, p. 18.



imperfections, is a success which cannot be expected of a man of his age who was barely acquainted with the critical principles of biography. "Even on the critical side," says M. Ikram,<sup>1</sup> "the modern critics, and English-educated scholars, would agree with me that the best book written on Ghālib was by a man who had a meagre knowledge of English."

Sir Sayyid's life presents great difficulties to a writer. His life is undoubtedly, the most complex and the most unsolved *Hayāt-i-Jāwīd*. enigma of the age. Hālī alluded to this phase in the preface to his book in which he explicitly stressed the necessity of 'criticism' and judicious judgment on the life of Sir Sayyid. He was, however, desirous of giving a truthful portrait of that great leader about whom much had already been said and more was being said at the time.

Before Hālī undertook this task, some other Biographies of Sir writers had also attempted the Sayyid. biography of Sir Sayyid. These included Col. Graham and M. Sirāj'ud-Dīn of Rāwal-pindī, but there efforts were not successful. Col. Graham's work, being in English, was intended to draw the character and to enumerate the services of Sir Sayyid. The other which was only in manus-

1. S. M. Ikrām : Ghālib Nāmāh, pp. 104-105.

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cript was utilised by Ḥālī in the compilation of his biography. The material for such a book was immense and Ḥālī by judicious selection could successfully fuse into a coherent whole the disconnected and vast records.

One of the conspicuous characteristics of *Ḥayāt-i-Jawīd* is its comprehensiveness and it is on account of its volume and exhaustive treatment that the book has suffered from 'rigidity of plan'. The author was so greatly anxious to bring out all the details of Sayyid's life that he had to indulge in many repetitions, even at the sacrifice of literary charm. His division of the book into two parts is mainly responsible for some overlapping. Several facts narrated in one connection have been recorded again in another connection. Hence the tedium with which the whole book is surcharged. It is a compilation rather than a composition. But, all the same, this laborious method has furnished the future biographer with ample material for a life of Sir Sayyid. Ḥālī has left in his book a mass of facts from which a more concise, lively, and veracious biography can be reconstructed.

*Ḥayāt-i-Jawīd* owing to its comprehensiveness, indeed, presents a picture of the society in which Sir Sayyid moved all his life: from his boyhood till the closing scene of

his life when he said to one of his friends: "The time has arrived when I shall be called to remain silent for ever. I, therefore, wish to prepare myself for that eternal silence."

A question may be asked: Is it a true portrait of Sir Sayyid—the man, with all his virtues and weaknesses? Is it a record of the personality, not only of the leader of the 'Aligarh movement but also of a sentimental human being—a bundle of passions, instincts and emotions?

Like all biographies in Urdu, *Ḥayāt-i-Jāwīd* Only externalities deals only with the externalities of touched. character. Ḥālī, no doubt, dwells upon the influences which made Sayyid Aḥmad what he was; but his penetration is only skin-deep. The mind and individuality of Sir Sayyid have not been touched and Sir Sayyid emerges from the pages of the book an incomplete personality. The reason for this is obvious, for Ḥālī never aimed at it: he only aimed at narrating graphically what his 'hero' achieved. No biographer, in that period, could rightly appreciate this notion of a biography which actuated Lytton Stratchey to depict the life of Queen Victoria, not as a queen but as a woman, under whose royal appearance there lay hidden a human being with emotional impulses of the tenderest character. Interest in man and his psychology is a development of comparatively

## BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

modern times.

But this defect is largely compensated by the abundance of fact that innumerable minor personal details of interest have been abundantly supplied. Sir Sayyid's early life, his education, his relation with his friends, his method of writing, etc., etc., have all received adequate attention.

His courage and portraiture of the dark side. Hālī has been criticised for his failure to delineate both sides of Sir Sayyid's character. Shiblī's stricture is the most violent of all. He says that *Ḥayāt-i-Jāwīd* contains "fulsome praise" and that "it is an apology". Admitting that the charge is partially justified, we must make an allowance for the spirit and manners of the society Hālī moved in which demanded that "the errors of the elders must not be pointed out"—خطائے بزرگان گرفتن خطاست. We should agree with Mahdī Ḥasan<sup>1</sup> who remarked that Hālī wrote a sympathetic life of Sir Sayyid and did not deserve so harsh a criticism from an author like Shiblī who himself was partial in many of his judgments and who did not believe in the basic truth of the critical method of European biography.

1. *Iḥdād-i-Mahdī*, (1923), pp. 359-60.

That Ḥālī really omitted to depict truth as regards certain events, could be illustrated by a few test cases, *e.g.*, the religious views of Sir Sayyid for which plausible interpretations are offered by Ḥālī; the weakness of Sir Sayyid in dealing with his son in the last stage of his life, when he acted much against the advice of his old friends; the affairs of the Trustees Bill in which his old friends and helpers like Waqār'ul-Mulk,<sup>1</sup> Muḥsin'ul-Mulk and others were ranged against Sir Sayyid; and the causes which led Sir Sayyid to keep away from the Indian National Congress. In all these and many other cases, Ḥālī's attitude is surely not consistent with the true functions of a good biographer. Similarly, he is not just in his opinions about the opponents of Sir Sayyid, *i.e.*, Mawlawī 'Alī Bakhsh Khān and Hājī Imdād 'Alī Khān who have been accused of malice and ulterior motives. In these cases, Ḥālī's spirit of impartiality has been overshadowed by his love of his friend and leader.

One could have expected that in the life of Sir Sayyid, with whom Ḥālī had the most cordial and intimate relations, there could be ample chances of self-introduction and self-praise: but one notices with

Elimination of  
the personal  
element.

1 *Waqār-i-Ḥayāt* by Ikram'ullāh.

great admiration that Ḥālī has scrupulously avoided to bring in his own person. Throughout the whole book only once or twice has the author introduced himself into the story. This detachment and restraint deserve our highest praise. He has, generally avoided sweeping and harsh judgments and his characteristics of moderation and sanity are, to a great extent, manifest in this book as well as in others.

Ḥālī's style, in all his books, is simple, limpid and smooth. It is highly fluent and natural. He is, rarely, swept away by the heat of the moment. He is cool even when the moment requires him to be passionate. The events of the Mutiny and the death of Sir Sayyid could not rouse him to pathetic and heated eloquence. Ḥālī is always cool and peaceful. His way of writing is, however, scholarly and it never fails him. He succeeds equally in the narration of simple facts of ordinary details and the exposition of such abstruse and technical questions as are discussed in his criticism of *Tafsīr'ul-Qur'an* of Sir Sayyid. In *Ḥayāt-i-Sa'dī* and the *Yādgar* there are touches of humour and the style occasionally rises to heights of sublimity. In *Ḥayāt-i-Jāwīd* the annotative method is adopted which aims at clarifying ideas and concepts of a subtle nature.

Ḥālī was, beyond doubt, the greatest biographer

in the Urdu language who immensely popularised this branch of literature among the Indian writers. He was not interested in History and his chief delight was in drawing the portraits of his favourite poets and leaders of men. His amiable character never allowed him to be harsh to any one and it is his gentle and sociable nature that enabled him to rise to the height of literary fame and made him one of the most conspicuous figures of Urdu language and literature.

#### IV

#### BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY—(*Contd.*)





## IV

### BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY—(*Contd.*)

#### 2. *Shibli Nu'mānī*

WE now come to the towering genius of the period who stood head and shoulders over the contemporary writers and who can be rightly classed among the most outstanding figures of India during the past three centuries. Shibli combined in him what was best in the contemporary life and thought of East and West. He made a deep and permanent impression upon his age: and, in innumerable ways, endeavoured to refine the literary taste of his people and increased their love of the sublime and the beautiful in Islamic literature. He had an aggressive and 'self-centred' personality—as men of genius usually have—and imparted a distinctly new colour and spirit to the recently-born Urdu prose. He made not only books but men—authors, who up to this day, are striving hard under the name of "Shibli

Academy," (Dār'ul-Muṣannifin) to keep alive the tradition brought into existence by their eminent master and inspirer at Azamgarh. He was primarily an historian, but he combined in himself the qualities of a biographer, a poet, a critic, a religious thinker, a philosopher, a journalist and a man endowed with a remarkable æsthetic taste.

His life      Muḥammad Shiblī was born at Bandūl (Azamgarh) in 1857 A.D.—the stormy year of the Indian Mutiny. After receiving his early education from Mawlānā Shukr'ullāh, a teacher at Azamgarh, the intelligent student travelled out and sat at the feet of several masters such as Mawlānā Muḥammad Fārūq Chiryākotī, Mawlānā 'Abd'ul-Ḥaqq Khayrābādī and Mawlānā Fayz'ul-Ḥasan Sahāranpurī, the last of whom, being a Professor at the Oriental College, Lahore, could only afford to give time to his pupil on his way to and back from the College. Shiblī went on pilgrimage to Mecca in 1876 A.D. and, on his return, busied himself for sometime in the Wahhābī-Sunnī controversy, and then thought of entering the profession of a Wakīl and Amīn. But he was not destined to be one: his lot had already been cast as a 'man of letters'. Fortunately for Urdu, the disappointed and unsuccessful lawyer turned to his proper and pre-destined profession. This was in



Allama Shibli Numani



Sir Sayyid

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1882 when he accompanied his brother, Mahdī, to 'Aligarh to get him admitted into the M. A.-O., College. Shibli met Sir Sayyid there and was won over. His subsequent life forms the subject of the following pages.

Of his prose works we shall have to say a great deal presently ; but his eminence as His poetry. a poet also deserves a few remarks here. Although Shibli admitted that " he was not a true poet in spite of the fact that he had been able to write thousands of verses,"<sup>1</sup> yet the qualities of independence and pathos which abound in his poetry give him a rank much above the average poets of the age. He was, in a way, the originator of 'political poems'<sup>2</sup> in Urdu. His Persian Ghazals are an expression of deep emotions mainly centring round Bombay, which is called by the poet himself 'the nursery' of his Ghazals. The romantic surroundings of that place stimulated many a beautiful flight of imagination.

Shibli not only won fame as a writer but was Other events honoured alike by the public as well as his life. as the Government. Some of the memorable events of his life are the award of

1. *Makātīb-i-Shibli*, vol. I, p. 302.

2. *Ma'ārif* (Azamgarh), June 1918 ; article on " Poetry of Shibli" by Maḥbūb'ur-Raḥmān Kalīm, p. 316.

'Majīdī Medal' by the Sultān of Turkey; the accident in which his foot was permanently injured; his securing the title of 'Shams'ul-'Ulamā'; the foundation of the 'Society for the Correction of Historical Errors'; and the death of his brother.

The outstanding traits of Shibli's genius were its many-sidedness and 'aggressive-ness'. He was a man of independent views and his criticism was occasionally misconstrued as partiality and injustice. His aim in life was to bring on a new and sound footing the literary movement which had till his time lacked spirit, life and purpose. He summarised his activities in one of his letters<sup>1</sup> and described as his goal the establishment of a new school of research on Islamic subjects.

Another important achievement of Shibli, already referred to above, was his effort to cultivate a true literary taste among his numerous friends and pupils and a cursory perusal of his letters will convince the reader that, even in his correspondence, he never missed a chance of guiding and instructing those who stood in need of his guidance and instruction. We shall revert to this point later.

1. *Ma'ārif* (Azamgarh), November 1923, p. 392.

## BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

Shiblī's literary life and work may, for the sake of convenience, be divided into six periods, each having its distinct peculiarity of thought and spirit.

Six periods of  
Shiblī's work  
and career.

### PERIOD I (1857-1882).

This was the early period of his education which was imparted to him in conformity with the old system of instruction.

### PERIOD II (1882-1898).

Shiblī was appointed Professor of Persian and Arabic at 'Aligarh in 1882. This was a landmark in the development of his mind. He filled this chair upto 1898, when, owing to ill-health, he had to leave the College. The following books were written during this period :

1. *Mathnawī Ṣubḥ-i-Ummīd* (1884).
2. *Mussulmānon ki Guzashṭah Ta'lim* (1887).
3. *Al-Mā'mūn* (1889), in 2 vols.
4. Papers on *Jizyah* and the *Kutub-Khānah-i-Iskandariyyah*.

In 1892 he journeyed to Syria, Egypt and Constantinople, and in 1893 he recorded his impressions of travels in these countries in a book entitled :

5. *Safar Nāmah-i-Shām wa Rūm*.



6. *Sirat'un-Nu'mān* (1893).
7. *Rasā'il-i-Shibli* (1898).

PERIOD III (1898-99).

This brief interval was devoted mainly to his efforts at improving his health at Kashmīr and at his home Azamgarh. During this period Shibli founded a 'National School' at Azamgarh and completed his well-known work

8. *Al-Farūq* (1899) in Kashmīr.

PERIOD IV (1899-1904).

In 1899 he was appointed Secretary of the 'Shu'ba-i-'Ulūm wa Funūn' at Hyderābād and he remained in this position up to 1904. This was the period of his active interest in Religion and Philosophy. Here he wrote :

9. *Al-Ghazzālī* (1902).
10. 'Ilm'ul-Kalām (1903 ?).
11. *Al-Kalām* (1904).
12. *Sawānīḥ Mawlānā Rūm*, and
13. *Mawāzinah-i-Anīs wa Dabīr*.

PERIOD V (1904-1913).

This comparatively long period was mainly devoted to the organisation of the 'Ulamā and the consolidation of the *Nadwat'ul-'Ulamā* which was

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started in 1894 and improved in 1898. Shibli introduced drastic reforms in the curriculum of religious education which was intended to be given in the *Nadwah* and insisted on the inclusion of English as a secondary language in the syllabus of studies for the 'Ulamā. Shibli's innovations were disliked by the orthodox and a section of political leaders. He, therefore, left this institution in 1913. Here he had started a high class journal of research, *An-Nadwah* which maintained a great standard of independent inquiry. The books that were written in this period were

14. *Shi'r'ul-'Ajam*, Vol. I (1908).
15. *Awrangzeb 'Ālamgīr par ek Nazar* (1908).

### PERIOD VI (1913-18TH NOVEMBER 1914).

Shibli severed his connection with the Nadwat 'ul-'Ulamā in 1913 and retired to his native place, Azamgarh, to work for the greatest ambition of his life, i.e., a life of the Holy Prophet and the foundation of an Academy (*Dār'ul-Muṣannifīn*). He was fortunate enough to see the realisation of both of these long-cherished dreams within his lifetime. The Academy was founded in 1913 and the *Sīrat* was also begun in the same year. He had only completed the first volume (the book has now reached its sixth

volume) when he was summoned away by the Lord Creator on the 18th of November, 1914.

The *Shi'r-ul-'Ajam* remained incomplete. Its first four volumes were published in the author's lifetime. The fifth volume was published after him. Other posthumous publications include Essays (*Maqalat*) and Letters (*Makātīb*).

In the words of Sharar, "he was born in 1857 and lived for 57 years. He appeared on the stage of life during the Indian Revolution and vanished during the World War. He was a great personality."

Shibli lived in six different places : namely, Azamgarh, 'Aligarh, Kashmīr, Hyderabad, Lucknow and Bombay. His activities in all these places show a gradual change. Each period has its own marked peculiarities, an appraisal of which seems to be necessary.

The change affected in the life of Shibli is manifest in both the chief domains of his life. External circumstances influenced his religious thought as well as his literary tendencies to a great extent.

In the sphere of religion, Shibli was in the beginning a formidable opponent of the Wahhābīs, against whom he wrote his Arabic treatise, *Iskat'ul-Mu'tadī*. At 'Aligarh, a change took place in his views and he

made progress towards liberalism which ultimately culminated in the triumph of 'rational idea' and the dominance of Reason in his mind. He, as Sharar has said, adopted and introduced a new school of "Neo-Mu'tazilism" (New School of Scholasticism) in India, as has already been referred to in the chapter on Theology.

The literary career of Shibli, in the real sense of the term, begins with his appointment at 'Aligarh where he imbibed the spirit of European History and conceived the idea of writing a history of Islam on the lines of the '*Sin'in-i-Islam*' of Dr. Leitner of the Punjab University. The 'Aligarh period may rightly be called the 'period of History' in the life of Shibli. The atmosphere at Hyderābād was permeated with the religious spirit along with progressive ideas and Shibli kept himself interested in Religion and Philosophy at that time.

After his departure from Hyderābād, the uppermost idea in the mind of Shibli seems to be that of 'reform' and change in the condition of the 'Ulamā, and found expression in the journal *An-Nadwah*.

During this period, we notice that a critical taste for Poetry is developed in him all of a sudden. This may, probably, be due to his visits to Bombay where he delighted to mix with the more refined society of

both sexes. His own poems and his compilation of "the most beautiful and charming book"<sup>1</sup> the *Shi'r'ul 'Ajam* were, undoubtedly, inspired by the pleasant surroundings of this "tavern of *Ghazals*" whose praises have been sung by him profusely. In the last part of his life, he again reverted to Religion and busied himself with the compilation of *Sirat'un-Nabi*.

That *Shibli* owed a great debt to the influence of the West has been discussed above. The most powerful channel through which these influences worked on his mind was the personality of Sir Sayyid who used to discuss his problems with the young scholar. Sir Sayyid possessed a big library which contained many valuable and rare books of the East and the West. When *Shibli* was first of all introduced to this library, he was very much fascinated and wrote in one of his letters:<sup>2</sup> "Sayyid Şahib has given me full permission to visit his library and have, therefore, got an ample opportunity of studying books"; and again he wrote: "Sayyid Şahib has in his possession valuable books on History and Geography in Arabic, the very existence of which is unknown not only to myself but even to big scholars." *Shibli*

1 Mahdi Hasan: *Ifādāt*; article on *Shi'r'ul-'Ajam*.

2. *Makātīb-i-Shibli*, vol. I, p. 60.

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spent most of his time in this library and it was here that, for the first time, he came across the "large-minded" Gibbon, *i.e.*, his work on history, a translation of which was partially prepared at the instance of Sir Sayyid. Thus a new avenue of historical research on scientific lines was opened to Shibli.

Among the professors at 'Aligarh, there was an Englishman who is now famous as the author of the *Preaching of Islam*. He was the eminent scholar, (Sir) T. W. Arnold, who was then engaged in the compilation of his work. He used to consult Shibli regarding important points of Islamic History. His relations with Shibli were profoundly cordial and one can imagine that Shibli received some inspiration from this great man also.

Another great source of European influence was Shibli's visit to the Islamic countries of the Near East. His impressions of these travels were published a year later. His original intention was to collect material for *Al-Farūq*, but incidentally he came to know that "even if we do not consider the matter from the point of view of self-government, we notice that the plight of the Muslims in these countries is not better than what we see in India : rather, they are in many

things nearer to the Muslims of India.”<sup>1</sup> Shibli got an opportunity of studying his problems of ‘reform in education’ in Islamic countries. He found that the educationists of these places, like those of India, were indifferent towards a healthy compromise between the East and the West and felt that “a rivalry between the old and the new still existed and the fusion of the two has not created any new system.”<sup>2</sup>

Even after his return from the Islamic countries, he remained in close touch with Egypt and the progress that Egypt was steadily making in various fields of activity. He wrote in one of his letters, “I have carefully studied the curriculum and have also studied the improvements effected in Egypt. I have obtained such books from Egypt as have never been consulted by anybody here.”<sup>3</sup> Shibli had friendly relations with the scholars of that country and besides inviting Sayyid Raṣhīd Razā of the “*Al-Manār*” to India, grappled with Jurjī Zaydan about his work *Tārīkh-i-Tamaddun-i-Islām*, a criticism of which was written by Shibli and published in “*Al-Manār*” of Cairo.

1. *Safar Nāmāh*, p. 8 (Introduction).

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Makātīb*, vol. I, p. 153.

Egypt was, at this time, the most advanced Islamic country, which was assimilating the modern spirit of the West through translations of European masterpieces of art, history and literature. This again proved of great help and influence to Shibli who, through the medium of Arabic, could get an access to the thought and life of the West. When Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship* was translated into Arabic, Shibli, at once, secured a copy and studied it thoroughly. He wrote to one of his friends: "Carlyle's work has been translated into Arabic. It is a good translation and is of great use to me."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, he was able to enjoy the study of the *Iliad* through its Arabic version, which gave him much help in his appreciation of Poetry. He was a subscriber to *Islām fī 'Asr'il-'Ilm*, a magazine which was edited by Farid Wajdī, an eminent savant of Egypt in those days.<sup>2</sup>

This contact benefited Shibli in many ways. He had an easy access to the thought of Europe. His critical faculties were developed through comparison and contrast and his vision was broadened. His attitude towards 'Rationalism' was determined through

1. *Makātib*, vol. I, p. 211.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 149.



foreign influences. His interest in the international political movement, 'pan-Islamism' was intensified and, last of all, his experience and knowledge of other countries further stimulated in him the desire to revive modern Islamic society on a broader and a more rational basis.

Though not as strong as the above, but surely Shibli's friends helpful, was the influence of his English-educated friends and pupils who endeavoured to acquaint Shibli with current movements of art and literature in Europe. The names of Shibli's brothers, Mahdī, Junayd, and Ḥamīd'ud-Dīn; of his friends, Shaykh 'Abd'ul-Qādir of Elphin-stone College, Bombay, M. Mahdī Ḥasan, Sayyid Nawwāb 'Alī, Mawlānā Muḥammad 'Alī (Cantab.) and 'Aṭiyyah Fayzī; and of his pupils, Mawlānā Sulaymān Nadwī, Mawlānā 'Abd'ul Mājīd and a host of others are scattered all over the pages of the *Makātīb*, as those who had rendered valuable assistance to their brilliant friend and master in his endeavour to take the best advantage of the Western lore in an estimate of his own work and achievement.<sup>1</sup>

What are the main springs of Shibli's senti-  
 The spirit, scope      ments which flow through the pages  
 and purpose of      of his work? What actuated him to  
Shibli's work.

1. For such passages see *Makātīb*, vol. II, pp. 13, 37; vol. I, pp. 235, 268.

undertake his important mission and what was his aim? These are questions of which no detailed reply is required. The mission of Sir Sayyid had a two-fold aspect: first to bring home to the nation a realisation of the present plight of the decadent Muslim society and its causes: and secondly, to impress upon the minds of his co-religionists that their past was exceptionally brilliant. Hālī was an exponent of the first part and to Shibli fell the duty of resuscitating the past. It was, therefore, a national duty, a sacred service and a noble mission that he was out to perform.<sup>1</sup>

The sole purpose of Shibli's work could be summed up in a single phrase: "Reconstruction of the past," or, in the words of a great Urdu scholar, "revivification of the literature and sciences of Islam."<sup>2</sup>

Shibli desired a blending of the new and the old, the East and the West. While, on the one hand, he was disgusted with the existing lethargy of the 'Ulamā, on the other, he was dissatisfied with the new class of educated people who were sunk in intellectual slavery of the West of whose culture they had only borrowed the externals and had not

1. Muḥammad Mahdī: *Shibli*, p. 1.

2. *Humāyūn*, Lahore, May 1930; article on Shibli by Miyān Bashīr Aḥmad, p. 420.

been able to penetrate into its depths. He again said that the English-educated class was worthless.<sup>1</sup> He wanted a middle class which might be capable of combining the good points of the two. To achieve this end, Shibli made out an elaborate scheme of work which was discussed by him in an article in *An-Nadwah*, an epitome of which was prepared by M. Mahdī Ḥasan in his article on 'Shibli Academy',<sup>2</sup> dividing the whole plan into the following sub-divisions :

- (i) translation of books on Modern Philosophy into Urdu and reconciliation of Philosophy with Religion ;
- (ii) a criticism of the principles of European literature ;
- (iii) a history of the Islamic Sciences ;
- (iv) a history of Arabic and Persian Poetry ;
- (v) a study of Islamic Culture and Civilisation ;
- (vi) contribution of the Mussulmans to the progress of Science and Culture.

These were the main branches of intellectual activity to which Shibli wanted to devote himself, heart and soul, and this, he declared, was consistent and in accordance with our past experiment. "It is true," says Shibli, "that to-day there are no Rāzīs and

1. *Makātib*, vol. I, p. 54.

2. *Ma'ārif*, June 1918, p. 18.

Ghazzālīs but their experiences are with us to guide us. In the light of these old and historic lessons, we can chalk out our path on which we have to tread and which will lead us to the place where would come the East and the West, the new and the old."

Thus Shibli compiled a history of Islamic Culture in its relation to various branches of knowledge, with special emphasis on Arabian thought and attitude and gave Islam the most central and important position in the world order. Religion was the chief force which gave him the spirit to work and the inspiration to reconstruct.

Shibli was above all an historian. Nothing could impress him deeply that was not historical. In history he found a solace and a satisfaction which he could get nowhere else. But instead of attempting at regular history he chose Biography as a medium of expression for it. His conception of Biography has been described above in the course of general remarks on Biography. The basic motive of his Biography was didactic but he insisted on a thorough investigation of facts and attached supreme importance to truth and impartial judgment. His portraiture of historic figures, in actual practice, was not sometimes as truthful as he said it ought to be; still his living pictures of Al-Mā'mūn, Imām-i-A'zam, Ghazzālī and Rūmī deserve

Shibli's conception of Biography.

our greatest praise and should convince us of the sanity of his outlook. But the sentiment of veneration and sanctity which is attached to a 'hero' and especially a 'religious hero' forms an almost insurmountable obstacle in the way of truthful and critical delineation of his subject. He has, however, not failed so far as he was free to paint the human side of his hero's individuality; and his biographies, despite their handicaps, are better than those of Ḥalī.

He believed that in a good biography along with the virtues and good points of a 'hero', his weaknesses should also be mentioned. If Biography be based on one-sided portraiture, "the very spirit of European Science would be annihilated." Shiblī was very keen about the critical investigation of the facts of the life of a hero who is very much admired and loved by people.<sup>1</sup> He realised that the picture painted should be real and devoid of any of the unnatural elements that usually creep into the lives of great men.<sup>2</sup> Due care for human psychology is an essential attribute of a good biography and no 'life' is complete which does not take into consideration this aspect of the human personality.<sup>3</sup> Shiblī, however,

1. *Sīrat'un-Nu'mān*, p. 69.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

did not like that this principle should be stretched too far, as it would be, he thought, "objectionable" and "dangerous".

In his life of Imām-i-A'zam (*Sīrat'un-Nu'mān*), which was compiled in 1893, Shiblī's 'Religious Biographies' has presented this great jurist in his true colours. He has discarded the supernatural and has proved that with all his qualities of head and heart, the Imām was a man, who in his polemical battles was, at times, seen as a partisan and a controversialist with an inclination towards self-praise. "These are human weaknesses," says Shiblī, "from which no man can be free."<sup>1</sup> This work is intended to glorify the Ḥanafite school of law as representing the most reasonable and the sanest view-point and the Imām as the greatest jurist in Islam. Reason is said to have been the sole criterion of truth in the decisions of legal points. Those who give importance to *Ḥadīth* have subjected this work to serious criticism, most of which is unjust. The second volume of this work, as Shiblī himself thinks,<sup>2</sup> is of greater worth in so far as it describes the growth and development of Islamic constitutional theory and jurisprudence.

1. *Sīrat'un-Nu'mān*, p. 94.

2. *Makātīb*, vol. I, p. 51.

*Al-Ghazzālī and the Sawānīḥ-i-Mawlānā Rūm*

*Al-Ghazzālī* were written in 1902 A.D. at Hyderabad and the *Life of Rūmī*. *ābād* when Shiblī was developing a phase of new scholastic theory and had resolved to write a history of Islamic religious philosophy in the form of the lives of her greatest exponents. Besides the two works, (*Kalām* and '*Ilm'ul-Kalām*) two biographies were also attempted. In depicting Ghazzālī, Shiblī tried to create an idea that Philosophy has invariably been playing an active part in moulding the thoughts of the Muslims in all ages.<sup>1</sup> He lays particular stress on the exercise of reason and independent judgment. Shiblī has paid more attention to the analysis of Ghazzālī's philosophical works because, he says, "this is the demand of modern times."<sup>2</sup> As a true biographer, Shiblī has rejected incredible stories about the Imām but, at the same time, he indulged in certain exaggerated views which impair the soundness of his work.

The *Life of Rūmī* was compiled at Hyderābād. This, again, was an attempt to demonstrate the triumph and popularity of philosophy, mystic thought and scientific truth during the medieval ages of Islam. Shiblī has referred to several problems in

1. *Al-Ghazzālī*, p. 251.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

the *Mathnawī* which have great significance from the stand-point of Science. He believed that the theory of Evolution, ascribed to Darwin, was known to these early Muslim thinkers long before it was expounded in Europe. Shibli has emphatically refused to believe in popular stories which abound in the biographical accounts of Rūmī and attributes them to the over-pious sentiments of his followers.<sup>1</sup> A genuine biography, he thought, should at all costs be free from myths.

There is still another class of biography which  
 Literary                      may conveniently be called 'literary  
 Biographies.              biography' to which Shibli turned in  
 his *Bayān-i-Khusru* and the *Shi'r-ul-'Ajam* (in five  
 volumes). As these are mainly concerned with the  
 history of Persian poetry and its criticism, we pro-  
 pose to deal with them in that section. About the  
 biographical details supplied in the book, we can  
 only remark that some of his researches and state-  
 ments, especially regarding Firdawsi have been criti-  
 cised and questioned by Prof. H.M. Shairānī in his  
 treatise, the *Tanqīd-i-Shi'r-ul-'Ajam* which was pub-  
 lished in the first instance in the *Urdu* (Quarterly) of  
 Awrangābād. *Shi'r-ul-'Ajam* is, however, commend-  
 able on the whole, and the author has tried his utmost

1. *Sawānīh-i-Mawlānā Rūm*, p. 104.



to gather trustworthy details for it. As a piece of scholarly criticism, the work has been eulogised as "the best book of the East" by Mahdī Ḥasan and declared "indispensable" by Prof. Browne.

By far the most important books, on which the popularity and greatness of Shiblī mainly rest, are his historical biographies. These are *Al-Mā'mūn*, *Al-Fārūq* and *Awrangzeb 'Ālamgīr par ek Nazar*. The *Sīrat'un-Nabī*, which forms a class by itself, should be distinctly treated as a work of *Sīrat*, which is a separate and a much-respected branch of Biography to which the Muslims in the past devoted themselves with great zeal.

Like Macaulay, Shiblī "is nothing if not historical". His view of History is not very much different from what was prevalent in Europe during the 19th and the early 20th century. The interest which Shiblī took in the philosophy of History is the main characteristic of his works. To him History should not only record events of wars, catastrophies and other incidents in the lives of the rulers and the ruled, but it should also be a record of human progress in its varied forms, including the intellectual development of mankind from time to time.<sup>1</sup>

1. *Al-Mā'mūn*, vol. I, p. 3.

*The Law of Cause and Effect.* According to Shibli, it is the imperative duty of an historian to trace the causes of events, for, they do not take place all of a sudden but are invariably the outcome of a long chain of causes in the recent or distant past.<sup>1</sup> Shibli criticises the ancient historians for their omission to realise this principle.

*The idea of Evolution.* After the spread of Darwin's theory in Europe, the idea of evolution began to be applied to History as well. The work of Shibli is, throughout, guided by this basic principle.

It may be remarked in this connection that Philosophy of Shibli was profoundly influenced by History. the Historian-Philosophers of Europe.

Carlyle's *Theory of Great Men* fascinated him very much, and the *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, as he said in one of his letters, was of supreme help to him. Gibbon's treatment of Islam "as a world force" elicited unbounded praise and appreciation from him. Although Ibn-i-Khaldūn was a pioneer in stressing the influence of physical environment on History, Buckle, in modern times, gave it a more scientific interpretation. Shibli was influenced by all these philosophers including Taine, Comte, Hegel and other European authors, and he has acknowledged

1. *Al-Fārūq*, vol. I, p. 11.

in his writings the debt he owed to them.<sup>1</sup>

Shibli has criticised Islamic History as well as European History. His chief objection against Islamic History is that the fundamental principles of History, viz., *Riwayāt* and *Dirāyat* (criticism in the light of commonsense) have not been applied by the historians and especially little attention has been paid to the latter. Moreover, they have not treated history as philosophy or as a record of human culture.

Despite his great admiration for Europe and its activities, he did not regard the European works on history as something entirely free from defects. The European historians, according to Shibli, lay stress out of all proportion on the principle of *cause* and *effect*. There is one more charge against the European authors, viz., that they are prejudiced against Islam, and owing to their ignorance and prepossessions, they do not paint Islam in its true colours.<sup>2</sup>

With all the high qualities and consummate skill he commanded, one cannot help saying that Shibli had a religious bias, which, according to the spirit of the age, could not

1. *Makātib*, vol. I, p. 210.

2. For a detailed explanation of "Shibli's Theory of History" see my article in the *Ma'ārif*, March-April, 1938.

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be dispelled from his mind. In one of his letters he said that he was writing as a judge and he had, therefore, to weigh both sides of the issue. The claim is not entirely unfounded. But it is also true that his judgment used to be, at times, rather that of a partial judge. In his discussion on the Battle of Badr, he is almost alone and against him are ranged a host of great traditionists and historians, but he insists on his own view and is convinced of the truth of his own reasoning. All this is done because he is out to prove that the Battle of Badr was a war of defensive nature.

The criticism that he was an interested apologist<sup>1</sup> and utilised his talents in the service of Religion alone,<sup>2</sup> or that his history was intended to satisfy the minds of those who drew inspiration from Europe<sup>3</sup> and was, therefore, alien to the basic spirit of History, are objections which scarcely hold water in the face of clear explanation which we have offered already about Shibli's methods and their actual application in his works. As regards religious bias, to which we have referred, we can only say that no historian can possibly be free from partisanship<sup>4</sup> and not even the scientific

1. Laṭīf: *Influence of English Literature on Urdu Literature*, p. 121.

2. Tanhā: *Siyar'ul Muṣannifīn*, vol. II, p. 217.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 425 (quotation from *an-Nāẓir*).

4. Walker: *Victorian Literature*, p. 844.

historian of the West (who believes in complete 'disinterestedness' "can deny himself wholly the joys of a combat".<sup>1</sup> Shibli's respect for facts, though not for 'hard' facts, was profound and he attached supreme importance to accuracy. He served his Religion but who can say that his services to literature and History were less valuable? Following in the footsteps of the 18th century historians of Europe, he assigned to Religion the highest place in his scheme of things, but that is what was done by Hegel and Carlyle who believed in the spiritual basis of history. His love of truth is impeccable, though his reasoning was sometimes clumsy. Like Macaulay, Shibli was the man who first succeeded in teaching History to his own people and although in some of his books of history and biography we find irrelevant remarks expressed by way of digression about contemporary matters such as the condition of the *Ulamā* and the decline of social and political consciousness among the Muslims, yet it can be safely affirmed that in *Al-Fāruq* and *Sirat'un-Nabī*, there is hardly any word which could be called superfluous.

*Al-Mā'mūn* was compiled in 1889, when Shibli was on the staff of the M. A.-O. College, 'Aligarh. The preface was written by Sir Sayyid himself. This is interesting, as it shows

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1. Bassett and others: *The Writing of History* (1926), p. 73.

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that Sir Sayyid, although not much interested in history as such, was conscious of the good points of modern historical methods.

As to why Mā'mūn was selected as a 'hero' in preference to other eminent Abbāsides including Hārūn, Shibli says that "if Hārūn had not been guilty of shedding the blood of the Barmakites, the choice would have fallen on him."<sup>1</sup>

Then there is the question, why and how the gigantic structure of the Umayyid Empire crashed to ground? Shibli points to several causes and ascribes its downfall to national, personal and social defects which culminated in the final overthrow of the Empire.<sup>2</sup>

Shibli's delineation of the characters of al-Mā'mūn and al-Amīn is excellent. While al-Mā'mūn was active, alert and intelligent, Al-Amīn, though endowed with natural gifts, was dull and unmindful of the forces that were working against him. He indulged in revelry even when the armies of his illustrious brother were at his door. But, here, we are concerned more with the character of the 'hero' depicted by the author. Shibli is, throughout, obsessed by the idea of truthful delineation but when (though only

1. *Al-Mā'mūn*, vol. I, p. 14.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

occasionally) he wishes to save his hero from strictures, he ascribes good motives to a bad action. The incidents of Mā'mūn's poisoning Imām-i-Rizā and his Commander Ṭāhir, and the suppression of the freedom of opinion and belief, have been justified on grounds of political expediency and public duty. Shiblī must present his 'hero' in the garb of a 'celestial creature' who always works under the pressure of higher impulses, and who is free from all temptations and promptings of a baser nature.

In *Al-Mā'mūn* Shiblī gives us a true picture of the society of those days and especially of its intellectual and literary activities. The details, provided in this book, of social conditions of the period of *Al-Mā'mūn* are fuller and more picturesque than we could find in some of the modern works on the subject, such as '*Aṣr'ul-Ma'mūnī*', an Arabic work (in 3 volumes), and other books written by Muir, Levy and Le Strange.

*Al-Fārūq* was completed in 1898. The author spent many years in long and elaborate research in connection with this work. He travelled far and wide in search of his material and was able to give it a final shape in 1899, when he was recouping his health in Kashmīr.

This book (*The Life of 'Umar, the Second Caliph of Islam*) is, according to the author himself, the best

of his works.<sup>1</sup> The most informative and instructive part of the book is its *Muqaddimah* in which Shibli has laid down the fundamental principles of studying and writing history. Particular reference may be made to the criticism of Islamic History and its rules for ensuring truth and accuracy. Shibli has given causes why the Muslim sense of historical accuracy deteriorated and has pointed to the channels through which disintegrating influence crept in. The most effective of the causes were two: first, that the *Hadīth* was not considered a primary source of historical knowledge and, secondly, that the causes of events were not explored; and further, that the principle of *Dirāyat* (critical method) was not followed.

There is much controversy about the part played by Caliph 'Umar in the matter of the election of a successor to the Holy Prophet, in which Shī'a historians usually cast a slur on the good name of this great Caliph of Islam. Shibli has powerfully rebutted all objections in this matter and has critically discussed the situation in which Abū Bakr's election was necessary.

In this book as well as in the *Sirat'un-Nabī*, Shibli has worked faithfully according to his own conception of history. No man would be an object

1. *Makātib*, vol. II, p. 266.



of more profound respect or reverence than 'Umar: still he was a man who could, at times, be swept away by a wave of anger or passions. The sternness and severity of 'Umar that were the essential traits of his character, have not been ignored by Shibli.

It has been said that Shibli, in the second volume of his work, has portrayed the conditions of social and political progress in such a way that one is tempted to think that the machinery and structure of government were very much the same in those days as we have them in modern times: and, the objection is not altogether baseless. But it must be remembered that Shibli has only used modern terms and present-day designations for various branches of administration which were introduced and developed by 'Umar. The difficulty in the way of Shibli was that, in order to make his description more intelligible to modern readers, he had to make use of modern terminology for which he could find no substitute. None can say that Shibli, even in one single instance, described what did not actually exist in the annals of that period. It is, however, true that Shibli was very enthusiastic about describing this early period of Islam in modern terms and wished to give a more scientific interpretation to those conditions with a view to creating a better impression of human culture in the golden age of Islam.

*Al-Farūq* is a great work. Shibli has exhibited in it his consummate skill as a literary craftsman and the book occupies a very high place in all Eastern literature for its excellent construction, wise selection of details and critical and judicious treatment of controversial matters. The work is assured of a permanent place in Urdu literature.<sup>1</sup>

This is the last and the most prominent compilation of the author. The original plan, 3. *Sirat'un-Nabi*, which was intended to embody and comprehend everything about the Holy Prophet, was ambitious, as Shibli wrote in one of his letters: "It is not merely a life of the Prophet but I wish to make it an encyclopædia."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately the author did not live to see his work completed but the continuation of the subject by Mawlānā Sulaymān Nadwī on the lines chalked out by the author, reveals the vastness of the original plan. We may have some objection to this plan as a work of biography, but we must remember that the idea in view of the author was not that of merely a biography to be compiled as a branch of literature, but the real object was to delineate the personality of the Holy Prophet with particular

1. The work has been translated into English by M. Zafar Ali Khan and has recently been published by Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore.

2. *Makātīb*, vol. I, p. 213.

emphasis on his work and achievement. The diffusion of modern ideas which emphasised the supremacy of the material side of life and sought to ignore the spiritual aspect, had created a new attitude about the true function and place of a prophet. This necessitated, says Shiblī, the clear exposition of Islamic doctrine with respect to the personality and function of a 'man', divinely appointed to reform the world. To illustrate this, we could only turn to the biography of the last of the Prophets, whose life was depicted by his followers with such minuteness, as has never been attempted in the case of any other human being. Every word that escaped his lips, every step that he took, every movement that he made, was recorded in the *Ḥadīth* and *Sīrat*. Not only in the past but even during the modern times, so much attention was paid to the life of the Holy Prophet that "the biographers of Prophet Mohammad form a long series which it is impossible to end but in which it would be honourable to find a place."<sup>1</sup>

The 'Introduction' to the *Sīrat* is a unique piece of literature. In fact, in its thoroughness, in its critical spirit and its general sweep, it is unsurpassed in the whole of Islamic literature. This *Muqaddimah* is a criticism

1. Margoliouth : *Life of Mohammed*, p. iii.

of the sources of the life of the Holy Prophet. As in *Al-Farūq*, so in this, Shibli has enumerated the dangers of ignoring *Ḥadīth* as an essential source of *Sīrat* and has demonstrated that most of the misunderstandings about the life of the Prophet were caused by this omission on the part of the early biographers, through whom European biographers have found an excuse to spread certain fallacious statements for missionary or political reasons. This 'Introduction' touches upon other important topics as well, *viz.*, the necessity of working on the principle of *Dirāyat* and using commonsense in establishing the truth of facts.

*Sīrat'un-Nabī* is permeated with the spirit of the age and is an illustration of how the whole religious attitude of the nation had taken a new turn in this period.

First of all, special importance is given to the 'human' side of the life of the Prophet. The supernatural element, in the whole discussion, is rarely allowed to enter. Capable of performing miracles, as he was, the Prophet has been presented as a 'man', an embodiment of reason and a personification of all 'human' virtues. Shibli has almost totally rejected the mass of literature and tradition which tends to portray the Prophet as 'super-human'.

Much space has been allotted to the 'wars' of the Holy Prophet. Not only the His wars were defensive. battle of Badr but all the wars fought by the Holy Prophet were defensive. The Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah which was a pact to end war, was described as an 'open victory', though, apparently humiliating. This, according to Shibli, goes to prove that Islam is a religion of peace.<sup>1</sup> Shibli was never so effective as in his attempt to refute the common charge that Islam believes in aggression. His discussions on this subject are critical and exhaustive and show the courage of the author when he speaks against some of the greatest authorities of Islam. In a chapter on the 'Holy Wars', he declares that the true function of a prophet is not war but the promulgation of peace. The only occasion for unsheathing the sword arose in the life of the Holy Prophet when the life and honour of the poor were in danger.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the topics which received greater attention from the author, are polygamy, Polygamy, slavery, etc. slavery, unity of Religion and State, methods of preaching Islam, in dealing with which Shibli is not much at variance with Sir Sayyid.

1. *Sīrat'un-Nabī*, vol. I, p. 458 (2nd edition).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 560.

## BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

Shibli lived to give a final shape only to the first two volumes of his work. The remaining four volumes, published after him, though pitched in the same key and written in the same spirit, do not really belong to the great author.

To summarise, the *Sirat* is an extraordinary work of great value. Its critical principles, its utilisation of the new material borrowed from and through European authors, its avoidance of polemical methods, its earnestness and devotion—all these qualities make the work a masterpiece in the whole range of Islamic literature.

Shibli's style, not only in the *Sirat* but in almost all of his works, is forceful and effective. No Eastern language can produce a paragraph which, in artistic beauty, transparent charm, force of language and choice of words could compete with that passage in the *Sirat*, which is about the birth of the Holy Prophet (*Zuhur-i-Qudsī*), which is, by the common consent of all the critics, the finest passage in the whole of Urdu literature. Shibli's style was always dignified and, like a true artist, he believed in selection of words. Unlike Sir Sayyid, Ḥālī and Nazir Aḥmad, he rarely used uncommon English and Arabic words. He employed suitable language for every topic with special regard

to the nature of the subject. Shiblī was, undoubtedly, the best writer of the age and his pen wielded an influence which none of his contemporaries could command. Sir Sayyid had a practical business-like style. Nazīr Aḥmad excelled in mastery of the pure idiom of Delhi; Ḥālī was too simple and prosaic : but Shiblī combined the good points of all without sharing the defects of any.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. *Zakā'ullah*

But for his voluminous writings which made a considerable addition to the store of Urdu Literature, in quantity rather than in quality, we would have preferred not to include Zakā'ullah in this criticism of the great authors of the "Sir Sayyid School." His only merit, which claims our attention, is his prodigious literary output. He wrote a large number of books on History and translated several scientific books from English. He was an active contributor to the *Tahzīb-ul-Akhlaq* of Sir Sayyid and his articles written in that journal have been published.

Zakā'ullah was born at Delhi in 1832. Like  
 His life.                      Azād and Nazīr Aḥmad he was a  
    student of the Delhi College and in

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1. For Shiblī's style see Muḥiyy'ud-Dīn Qādirī: *Urdu ke Asālīb-i-Bayān* (in *Suhayl*, vol. I, p. 80), and Sa'īd Anṣārī: Shiblī.

## BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

memory of those days, the Rev. C.F. Andrews, a friend of Zakā'ullah, has written a biography called '*Zakā'ullah of Delhi*'. After early education he was appointed teacher of Mathematics in his own College, but later he got an appointment in the Agra College. He also worked as an Inspector of Schools and was appointed a Professor at the Muir College, Allahabad in 1872, having refused a similar job in the Oriental College, Lahore, in the same year. He retired after 24 years' service and died in 1910.

He was a great supporter of Sir Sayyid and took part in all the movements started by the latter. In his efforts to enrich the vernacular Zakā'ullah offered his full assistance to Sir Sayyid and actually translated several books in Urdu. Zakā'ullah deserves great praise and appreciation for producing the large mass of translations which have enriched the Urdu language to a great degree.

For the present we are only concerned with his historical works. It is a matter for surprise that out of that large group of Sir Sayyid's followers and friends few took any interest in History. Shibli and Zakā'ullah are the only happy exceptions. It is, however, worthy of attention that Zakā'ullah lacked originality and the critical disposition essential for an historian. He was, never-



theless, acquainted with European theories of History, as is evident from the Introduction to his voluminous book, the *Tā'rīkh-i-Hindustān*, in which he explained his conception of History, though in such a slipshod manner that one fails to appreciate the labour expended on the undertaking.

One special feature of the 'Introduction' is Zakā'ullah's that the author has included in it the view of History. views of Muslim historians about the nature and function of History along with those of the European historians. Thus Bayhaqī, Baranī, Khawand Amīr and Ibn Khaldūn have been ranged side by side with Seely, Buckle and Flint. The gist of all that has been embodied in this review of history is the common idea, prevalent in this age, that History should be a record of human progress and should be treated as a 'science'. Zakā'ullah, like Shiblī, was not unconscious of the prejudices of the European authors about Islamic History and held that they were generally one-sided and wrote in a spirit of partisanship.

His is a big book and with all the pretensions of its author, it has been fashioned on the *Tā'rīkh-i-Hindustān*. model of Elliot's *History of India*. Certain portions of the book are mere translations of the original Persian books embodied in *Elliot's History*. Despite his declared object of compiling a

cultural history, few details about society and culture have been supplied. It would, however, be unjust not to acknowledge that *Zakā'ullah's History* was the first comprehensive history of India in Urdu and it is a pity that, even to-day, we do not come across any history of India which may be an improvement upon the "uncritical" work of Zakā'ullah.

Zakā'ullah wrote two more books of history, viz., *Ā'in-i-Qayṣarī* and *Ā'in-i-Qayṣarī* and *Farhang-i-Farang*, and *Farhang-i-Farang*. which are more or less translations of English books. The first is the Life of Queen Victoria, which is regarded as slightly better than the *Farhang* (a book dealing with English history) but neither is popular. Only a few people, to-day, would care to read them.

Zakā'ullah wrote as many as 143 books, out of which 81 are on Mathematics and the rest on other subjects. As most of these were written as text-books for schools, their value as original books is insignificant. In fact the author never claimed originality.



V

LITERARY CRITICISM  
AND MISCELLANEOUS PROSE



## V

### 1. LITERARY CRITICISM

ALTHOUGH *Tahzib'ul-Akhlāq* introduced literary and social criticism into Modern Urdu Literature, due attention was not paid by contemporary scholars to this important branch of study. This lack of interest was due to the reason that Sir Sayyid and his friends had, in the main, interested themselves in the work of national awakening and social reform, and Literature and Art were not pursued for their own sake. Even books of History, Religion and Fiction were dedicated to this one purpose.

Men of letters of the time did not, however, altogether omit to do any work in this field. As the cultivation of literary taste was deemed a part of national duty and social reconstruction, criticism of Persian poetry was taken up along with the movement for reform in Urdu poetry. Certain methods of approach were suggested and lines of reform recommended.

Ḥālī was the accredited pioneer of this movement and our language owes a great debt of gratitude to him for his initiative. Ḥālī as a critic of Poetry. Ḥālī was, first of all, introduced to the thought of the West at Lahore where he was asked to improve the language of the translations from English. Here he got an opportunity to compose verses of a new type in the *Mushā'arāhs* of the Anjuman-i-Panjab. The *Tahzīb'ul-Akhlāq* and the influence of Sir Sayyid intensified this tendency to revolt against the old ideals and compelled Ḥālī to start a movement for literary reform.

Ḥālī's canons of criticism are embodied in his memorable books, *Muqaddimah Shī'r wa Sha'irī*, *Ḥayat-i-Sa'dī* and *Yadgar-i-Ghalīb*. Some principles of literary criticism have been enumerated in *Ḥayat-i-Jawid* also in which he evaluated the writings of Sir Sayyid.

The *prolegomena* of Ḥālī is an epoch-making work whose reputation, even after the lapse of half a century, has not suffered in any way. Its value is enhanced considerably when we think that it was written in a period when the atmosphere was not so conducive to the assimilation of foreign ideas as it is to-day and when 'conventionalism' was so rampant that any attempt

to depart from the beaten track was considered an act of heresy.

In his introductory remarks on poetry and its relation to culture, Hālī held the view that poetry derives its spirit and essence from the social and political environments of the poet. According to him the despotic form of government tended to impair the beauty of Oriental verse and its development was checked on account of the unhealthy influences of an autocratic form of State. Urdu, which is the child of Persian, retained much of the characteristics of its mother language and its poetry is modelled on Persian forms. Hence it is generally conventional, artificial and devoid of any deeper spiritual craving. This, according to Hālī, needed complete overhauling and drastic reform.

The greatest requisites for a good living poetry are its earnestness and sincerity,<sup>1</sup> and the elements of falsity and exaggeration which have gone to mar the beauty of Persian poetry should, at all costs, be avoided.

Moreover, it is necessary for true poetry that it should be spontaneous and expressive of profound feelings and impulses of the human mind. Any attempt to confine

1. *Muqaddimah*, p. 115.



Urdu within the strait-jackets of Lucknow and Delhi would not only arrest the chances of free development but expose it to final extinction. Ḥālī insisted that the limits of Urdu must be extended so as to make it capable of digesting what is good and wholesome in other languages. In his opinion Urdu poets should freely borrow ideas from Arabic, Persian, English and Hindi and thus give new vitality to their poetic tradition.

Ghazal, being the most popular form of poetry, Criticism of Ghazal. has received fuller attention from Ḥālī. There is an age-long convention that the 'beloved' in Persian poetry is referred to in the 'masculine gender' which is objected to as being an indication of a sexually perverted mentality. Ḥālī took strong exception to this phase of Ghazal and recommended that the utmost care should be taken to avoid any reference to the sex of the beloved. The romantic idea in Ghazal should be comprehensive so as to cover all forms of love, viz., love of Nature, love of human Beauty and love of Art.<sup>1</sup> Ḥālī equally protested against the mention of the beloved in the feminine gender and the description of her beauty and love affairs in a public manner. The compromise, he suggested, was that the mascu-

1. *Muqaddimah* (1893 ed.), p. 121.

line gender should only be regarded as a symbol. Ḥālī was strongly in favour of abandoning wine-songs and liked the omission of sarcastic references, in poetry, to the 'pious one' (Zāhid). In short, the principal reform which Ḥālī desired to attempt was the introduction of the elements of truth and sincerity which were absent from old poetry. The inspiration was, without doubt, drawn from English literature, reference to which was frequently made in the *Muqaddimah*. Attention has, however, been drawn to Arabic poetry, which is profusely rich in genuine feeling and is true to emotion and human nature. Ḥālī urged the Indian poets to follow this aspect of Arabian verse.

*Ḥayāt-i-Sa'dī* is professedly a biographical work but it also contains many principles of criticism in *Ḥayāt-i-Sa'dī*. Elements of criticism in *Ḥayāt-i-Sa'dī*. his appreciation of Persian poetry, in general and the poetical works of Sa'dī in particular. It was the first book in the whole of Urdu literature which introduced this critical element in the biography of men of letters. Ḥālī, like Shiblī, was very fond of making 'comparisons and contrasts'.

It is an admitted fact that the beauty of Persian Poetry is often judged from the stand-point of philological peculiarities. Rarely does one come

across a poet with a 'definite message' for humanity or with a particular interpretation of life. Hali, owing to his acquaintance with English poetry, was keen to discover what definite message the poetry of Sa'di contained and what relation it had with life and its various aspects. He endeavoured to find out truth in the poetry of Sa'di and maintained that Sa'di's *Qasā'id* and *Ghazals* did aim at a true interpretation of life and touched the problems of human existence in one way or the other. Thus in his *Qasidahs* he protests against the prevailing corruption among the aristocracy and the upper grades of society. His wise counsels to kings and amirs, his preachings to masses, and his insistence on the realistic side of the *Ghazal*—all go to prove that Sa'di was a great poet who drank from the fountain-head of divine inspiration.

We have already dealt with *Yadgar-i-Ghalib* as  
 Elements of a biography. It has been claimed by  
 criticism in the author that it embodies a criticism  
*Yadgar-i-Ghalib*. of Ghalib's poetry as well. The claim  
 is, however, unfounded as the method of criticism  
 adopted therein is defective and not consistent with  
 the rules of critical appreciation necessary for the  
 true understanding of the work of Ghalib. On the  
 other hand, it may be called a selection of Ghalib's  
 poetry with explanatory notes. A comparison of this

work with the *Ghalib Namah* by Mr. Ikrām would be sufficient to show that Ḥālī did not approach his subject from the right critical angle, nor did he accomplish the task set before himself.

To conclude, it must be remarked that Ḥālī, as Mr. Ikrām has pointed out, like his contemporaries, was not adequately acquainted with the standards of criticism maintained in English. His attainments in this field were indirect and second-hand. Nonetheless, he showed a highly refined taste in his selections and preferences and was exceptionally judicious in his judgments. We can credit him with some of the most essential virtues of a good critic, *i.e.*, the quality of disinterestedness and balance of mind.

Shiblī was a dominating figure everywhere. We have already studied him in other capacities, where he displayed his eminence as an historian, a biographer and a religious thinker. In the field of criticism and literary appreciation, he was in no way less prominent. His fine æsthetic taste, his sense of appreciation of Beauty in every form, and his profound knowledge of Persian verse, have given him a rank not excelled by anybody in his age. He was always original, critical and analytical. His fondness for generalisation and systematisation was the dis-

Shiblī as  
a critic of  
Poetry.

tinguishing feature of his genius. Like Ruskin, he was at his best when he displayed his ability in framing rules and tried to overawe the reader with a formidable array of 'principles.'

Shi'r'ul-'Ajam is a work dealing with biographies of poets with critical appreciation of their poetry. About this history of Persian poetry, it has been said by Mahdī Ḥasan that "it is the finest specimen of 'Higher Criticism' " and that "not only in Urdu Literature but in the whole field of Eastern Literature, a book so excellent, as Shi'r'ul-'Ajam, has never been written."<sup>1</sup>

Shi'r'ul-'Ajam has a much wider scope and is more critical than the Sakhundān-i-Shi'r'ul-'Ajam. Prof Browne on Pārs of Āzād and Browne's *Literary History of Persia*. It is more comprehensive and covers more extensive ground. Doubtless it was not possible for Browne to appreciate the true spirit and beauty of Persian poetry owing to his Western mind and peculiar way of looking at things Eastern. Still it speaks volumes in favour of Shi'r'ul-'Ajam that Browne, in the last two volumes of his work, quoted Shibli frequently and paid him a tribute which no other scholar of India could receive from him.

1. Mahdī Ḥasan: *Ifādāt*.

Shibli has been criticised for his inaccuracy in Shi'r-ul-'Ajam by Prof. Shairānī.  
 Prof. Shairānī's criticism of Shi'r-ul-'Ajam. This criticism is well-founded, as mistakes of facts and dates certainly exist in the book ; but they are not so significant as to detract its value as a whole.

The Introduction to Shi'r-ul-'Ajam 'on the nature of poetry' is a wonderful piece of literary writing which "Urdu literature can be rightly proud of, on account of its minute understanding of the subject, simplicity of language and the mode of expression."<sup>1</sup>  
 The 'Introduction' to Shi'r-ul-'Ajam. Although the basic ideas have mostly been derived from English books, yet this review of poetry has no parallel in the whole of Urdu literature. Like Hālī, Shibli was considerably influenced by the ideals of Arabic poetry which is more realistic than any other poetry of the East.

Shibli's principles of criticism are numerous. According to him, poetry is influenced by its environment and social and political conditions help to give a new direction to the poetry of a people.  
Shibli's main principles of criticism.

Shibli classified poetry in a new way according to its meaning in relation to life and Nature. Thus, instead of dividing it  
 New classification of Poetry.

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1. Humāyūn (Lahore), 1930 : "Shibli" by M. Bashīr Aḥmad, p. 433.

into Ghazal, Qaṣidah, etc., he made the following divisions, *viz.*, Razmiyyah, 'Ishqiyyah, Akhlaqiyyah, Ṣufiyanah, Falsafiyanah, etc. According to Shibli, in order to have a clear idea of poetry as a whole, its periods of development should be fixed and defined : and the distinctive features of each period should be described.

Every poet must have a message for humanity, without which his poetry would be lifeless.

Shibli, as an historian, was very much interested in tracing the chain of cause and effect. He also investigated the causes of the rise of Persian poetry and its subsequent decay.

Shibli laid particular stress on those aspects of poetry which create a sense of self-respect and self-consciousness in the people and urge them to love freedom and independence in the social and political spheres of their life.

Shibli was very fond of 'comparison and contrast' like Hālī and the same method of evaluation has been adopted by Browne in the case of Hāfiẓ and Khwājū.

No Iranian poet earned so much admiration as Firdawsī for his monumental epic, the Shah Namah. Here, again, Shibli Shibli's estimate of Shah Namah.

and Browne are seen in opposite camps. While Browne did not appreciate the beauty of *Shah Namah* and did not consider it worthy of high praise, *Shibli* placed it on an equal footing with the *Iliad* of Homer. He painted Firdawsī as a poet endowed with a knowledge of the human heart and gifted with keenness of observation and skill of delineation.

It has often been said by critics that *Shi'r-ul-Repetitions in 'Ajam* suffers from overlapping and *Shi'r-ul-'Ajam*, repetition and the peculiarities assigned to one poet have been attributed, with equal emphasis, to the other. The charge is not far from being true.

As a whole, *Shi'r-ul-'Ajam* is one of the most original books ever written in any Mahdī Ḥasan on *Shi'r-ul-'Ajam*, Eastern language. It is thought-provoking and touches the heart. It has contributed considerably to the cultivation of a healthy taste for Persian poetry. Indeed, there is not much exaggeration in the opinion of Mahdī Ḥasan that "*Shi'r-ul-'Ajam* is a lively picture of the most pleasant and sweet emotions expressed in Persian—the most emotional language of the world."

In this work, the author has made a comparative study of the poetry of Anīs and *Muwāzinah-ī-Anīs-wa-Dabīr*, Dabīr, and has given his judgment as to which of the two was a greater artist. *Shibli's*



analysis of their comparative merit extended both to form and substance and he laid particular stress on the essential requisites of a good poet, *viz.*, his ability to interpret life and his skill to delineate characters faithfully. Anīs, he concluded, could search the heart of man better and his knowledge of human psychology was abundantly displayed in his '*Marthiyahs*'.

Shibli's criticism of old Urdu poetry is severe. Says he: "It is a sign of a decadent society that poetry should only be restricted to the mere description of '*Zulf*' (tress), '*Khaff*' (down) and '*Khāl*' (mole) and unqualified flattery should capture its spirit."<sup>1</sup> True poetry is that which touches the heart and springs out of the heart: everything else is an outward decoration. Thus Shibli was very keen about sincerity in poetry and insisted on fidelity to nature and life. Poetry should be a mirror of the human soul and should reflect the true hidden throbbings of a heart which feels. It was a great ideal indeed.

## 2. Journalism

Frequent references have already been made to *Tahzīb'ul-Akhlaq* *Tahzīb'ul-Akhlaq* of Sir Sayyid and *An-Nadwah*. *An-Nadwah* of Shibli in this book.

1. *Muwāzinah* (1921 ed.), p. 2.

Earlier than these, Sir Sayyid had started the Magazine of the Scientific Society which was later called the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*. But the influence, which the *Tahzib'ul-Akhlaq* wielded, was more powerful and widespread than that of any other journal of the period. It was modelled expressly on the *Spectator* and the *Tatler* of Addison and Steele. It was greatly instrumental in bringing about social and religious freedom, particularly freedom from religious convention.<sup>1</sup> It proved an effective incentive to the fostering of the spirit of inquiry and research and did much to cultivate a taste for literary criticism. *An-Nadwah* aimed at the literary, educational and political rebirth of the community.

Among its contributors were Ḥālī, Muḥsin'ul-Waḥīd'ud-Dīn Mulk, Chirāgh 'Alī, Waḥīd'ud-Dīn Salīm Salīm and others. We have already made a mention of some of them in different contexts. Waḥīd'ud-Dīn Salīm has not, however, been dealt with so far. He was born at Panīpat and studied Persian and Arabic with Mawlānā Fayz'ul-Ḥasan and Mawlānā 'Abdu'llāh Ṭonkī, who were professors at the Oriental College, Lahore. His knowledge of English was elementary but his general knowledge was vast. He died in 1929.<sup>2</sup>

1. Laṭīf: *Influence of English Literature on Urdu Literature*, pp. 116-17

2. For his life, see *Urdu* (Awrangābād), January 1929.

Wahid'ud-Din Salim is best known for his journalistic work. Some years before his death, Sir Sayyid employed him as a literary assistant in which capacity he began to write articles in the *Tahzib'ul-Akhlaq* and other literary journals like the *Aligarh Monthly*, *Aligarh Gazette*, etc. After the *Tahzib'ul-Akhlaq*, he started the *Ma'arif* from 'Aligarh in 1898. He was also appointed editor of the *Aligarh Gazette* and after leaving Aligarh he edited several other papers such as the *Muslim Gazette* and *Zamindar* (Lahore) and made a great success of them.

The most important work of Salim is *Waz'i-Istilahat-i-'Ilmiyyah* which helped considerably to enrich the language with new scientific terms coined from other languages. Salim had in view the revision of the *Lughat-i-Ashafiyah* but his death in 1929 did not allow him to accomplish this work.

He was a follower of Sir Sayyid in prose style and always preferred to be simple.

### 3. Letters

There is one more branch of literature which because of its spontaneity and naturalness claims the status of an independent art. It is the letters of literary men which prove

Letters of  
Shibli.

very helpful in collecting useful material for a good biography. They often make silent betrayals of the writers' individuality which would otherwise remain unfolded. We can mention the *Makātib-i-Shiblī*, as the most interesting of all such collections which not only give a vivid picture of the environment in which Shiblī lived but also afford us an opportunity of penetrating into the human side of this great author. The whole personality of Shiblī, as Mahdī Ḥasan said, is revealed and reflected in the lines of these letters.<sup>1</sup> Another series of his letters, called *Khutūt*, addressed to 'Aṭiyyah Fayzī and her sister, possess a fine romantic touch and a charm that is all their own.

We have had, so far, no chance of mentioning Letters of Nawwāb Waqār'ul-Mulk in any connection, because he excelled in no branch of literature. He was an ardent supporter of Sir Sayyid and a recognised leader of the Muslims after Sir Sayyid and Muḥsin'ul-Mulk. His letters, which have been published, are a mine of information regarding the political and educational problems of the Mussulmans, and have been profitably used in the biography of Waqār'ul-Mulk called *Waqar-i-Hayat*. His style of writing is straight-

1. *Makātīb*, vol. II, Preface.

## LETTERS

forward, practical and simple. The letters are impressive and convincing as may be expected from the pen of a leader, whose greatest quality was the magnetism of pen and personality.

VI  
STORY-WRITING



## VI

### STORY-WRITING

*Nazir Aḥmad*

WE will now turn to Nazir Aḥmad who, in spite of being a great linguist, translator, speaker and theologian, is chiefly remembered as a story-writer. We will, therefore, give a prominent place to his works of fiction in this treatise.

The famous Delhi College was founded in the Education at year 1825 A.D., under the old education at Delhi College. educational scheme of the Government of India. This educational centre of the early days of English rule wielded great influence over the minds of the Indian youth; and one of the far-reaching results that it achieved, in the intellectual sphere, was this that some of its young scholars came later on to enjoy great reputation in the literary world. "This is the first seat of learning," says Mawlānā 'Abd'ul-Ḥaqq, "where the East met the West under



the same roof, and in the same room the knowledge of both the Eastern and the Western literatures was imparted. This union worked wonders in facilitating the fusion of ideas, and broadening the minds of scholars, thus laying the basis of a new culture. It produced a group of men of high attainments including authors of great maturity of thought, broad-mindedness and depth of learning to whom our society is deeply indebted.”<sup>1</sup>

One of these men was Nazir Ahmad who acquired his early education under the guidance of his father Mawlawi Sa'adat Ali, and later, under other teachers like Mawlawi Naṣr'ullah Khān and Mawlawi 'Abd'ul-Khaliq. But later on, life in the Delhi College introduced him to a new world and it was there that he imbibed the spirit of Western learning. Says he: “Had I not been educated at the Delhi College, should I tell you what I would have been? I would have been a narrow-minded fanatic and a self-conceited *Mawlawi*, ignorant of my own spiritual weaknesses; mad after finding the weaknesses of others; a partial judge of my own capabilities, and a foolish friend of the Muslims: blind and deaf to the voice of the Time.” Indeed it

Influence of the  
Delhi College on  
Nazir Ahmad's  
character

1. 'Abd'ul-Ḥaqq : *Marḥūm Dehlī College*, p. 169.

## STORY-WRITING

was the education acquired at this College that gave Nazir Ahmad his vastness of knowledge, independence of opinion, toleration and originality of thought, which are the real fruits of culture and which form the true basis of character. He joined the College in 1845 and left it in 1854, having gone through the full prescribed term of study at the institution.

During his college career, Nazir Ahmad was not at all interested in history and English for the obvious reason that he was destined to shine forth primarily as a man of letters and a scholar of Religion. Indeed, he rendered really a great service to his countrymen in these spheres.

When Nazir Ahmad joined the Delhi College he was not allowed by his father to study the English language,—a tendency not uncommon in those days. He had to make up that deficiency during his official days.

Though he was educated on the old lines and did not pay attention to the English language in the beginning, nevertheless, he grew tolerant of new ideas and ideals. He acquired a sense of modernism and opened his mind to what was new. This phase is

evident in both the religious and political leanings of Nazir Ahmad.

Though these were early days of contact with English culture and thought and the beginning of the modern intellectual revolution, a reaction was already setting in. It is to the credit of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān that he infused life into this movement with courage and enthusiasm. The ideas that were agitating the minds of the people secretly and individually found an organised and open expression, and there now appeared no necessity for keeping them hidden.

Nazir Ahmad was introduced to Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān during his official life. His contact with Sir Sayyid. and their friendship continued till death separated them. After retiring from Hyderabad, Nazir Ahmad joined Sir Sayyid's educational movement as a sincere and enthusiastic worker. "I have so far never disobeyed his command," remarked Nazir Ahmad, "nor shall I do so in the future, God willing." And again, "If I were in search of a religious leader, I would certainly accept his (Sir Sayyid's) leadership."<sup>1</sup>

But it should be borne in mind that the influence of Sir Sayyid on Nazir Ahmad. His differences with Sir Sayyid. was of an indirect kind. In the

1. *Ḥayāt'un-Nazir*, p. 442.

realm of literary activity his service in the Education Department was responsible for most of his memorable work ; and religious tolerance and broad-mindedness were the results of his stay at the Delhi College. In religious affairs, although the 'Ulema of the old school looked upon Nazīr Aḥmad as a free-thinker, he had his differences with Sir Sayyid's religious views. Sir Sayyid's mind was, according to Nazīr Aḥmad, saturated with the sentiment of national service but "extremes are always bad and, to my mind, in this lies the only weakness of Sir Sayyid." <sup>1</sup>

Nazīr Aḥmad started with a low-paid job at Gujrat (Punjab). Then he obtained  
 His career. an employment at Cawnpore, in his own province. Later, he was appointed a Deputy Inspector at Allahābād. In the meanwhile, he had translated into Urdu certain treatises on law to which we will refer in due course. Then he was promoted to the post of deputy collector, in which capacity he worked in several districts.

During this period, Hyderābād was the most important political and historical centre for the Muslims of India. The grandeur of Delhi and Lucknow was reflected in Hyderābād ; almost all the important personalities of Muslim India were brought

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1. *Ḥayāt'un-Nazīr*, p. 534.

together in the service of the Nizām at Hyderābād. We have already referred to the activities of Sir Sayyid, Muḥsin'ul-Mulk, Waqār'ul-Mulk and Shiblī. Nazīr Aḥmad was another star in this galaxy. He went to Hyderābād in 1877 in the first instance as a temporary measure, but later came to reside there permanently. After retirement he settled at Delhi.

Though Nazīr Aḥmad is primarily famous as a story-writer and a translator of the Holy Qur'ān, yet he enjoyed great reputation for other attainments too. He was a great orator. The service that he rendered to the Urdu language by translating legal treatises is unparalleled. He was, moreover, a poet of no mean order. He was a linguist and knew languages like English, Talangi and Sanskrit.

Nazīr Aḥmad began his literary career while he was working as a Collector in the Jalgaon District, and it continued right up to his last days. His works may be divided into four categories:

1. Text-books for children.
2. Treatises on Religion and Theology.
3. Legal Treatises—all translations.
4. Stories.

We will now take up a detailed criticism of his stories which are seven in number :

1. *Mir'at'ul-'Arūs* (1869).
2. *Banāt'un-Na'sh* (1872).
3. *Tawbat'un-Nuṣūḥ*.
4. *Ibn'ul-Waqt* (1878).
5. *Muḥṣinat* (1885).
6. *Ayāmā*.
7. *Ru'yā-i-Ṣādiqah*.

M. Abd'ul-Ḥaqq has rightly said that “ had  
 1. *Mir'āt'ul-'Arūs* Nazīr Aḥmad written no book except-  
 ing *Mir'at'ul-'Arūs*, his reputation as  
 a great Urdu writer would still have been secure.”<sup>1</sup>  
 Most surely this is a true judgment by a great critic.  
 Nazīr Aḥmad wrote this book for the use of his own  
 children and, undoubtedly, service in the Education  
 Department had made him conversant with the  
 special needs of the juvenile members of society. It  
 was compiled piecemeal, different chapters having  
 been completed at different times and imparted to the  
 children as lessons. This book was primarily written  
 for his eldest daughter and was presented to her as  
 dowery on her marriage. It was the first book which  
 won great reputation for the author, both from the  
 State and the public.

1. *Ḥayāt'un-Nazīr*, p. 2, Preface.

Another name for *Mir'at'ul-'Arūs* is *Akbarī* "*Akbarī Aṣḡharī*." *Aṣḡharī*. The name is taken from the two sisters in the story, Akbarī being the elder and Aṣḡharī the younger. They were married to the brothers, Muḥammad 'Āqil and Muḥammad Kāmil respectively. Akbarī was bad-tempered and proud and as such, soon after her marriage, prevailed upon her husband to live separately from his parents and, at last, ended her life in ruin. The younger sister, Aṣḡharī, on the contrary, was a great pet with her husband's people on account of her good disposition. Hers was a life of service, sacrifice and selflessness. In everything she did, her sole aim was sincerity and loyalty to her husband. In fact, she sacrificed everything—her personal comfort, her wealth and her pleasure for her husband's real happiness.

Why was Akbarī so bad-tempered? Simply because all girls who are pets in their Akbarī's character. early years, and are badly brought up, are such in their advanced years. Akbarī had been spoilt by her mother and grandmother. She had neither education nor skill in taking to innocent feminine pursuits. The result was that she was a constant source of trouble to herself and her husband's relatives. Aṣḡharī, on the other hand, had had better education and training (though the reason

why it was so is not clear), and grew up to be an ideal woman even for these modernity-ridden days :

“ This girl was in the home as a flower in the garden or as the eye in the human body. She was skilled in everything. A cultured mind ; a skilled hand ; of modest nature and respectful to others ! God had endowed Aṣgharī with all the good traits. In her younger days, she did not like play, idle talk or mischief-making. All she did was to read, or to take interest in household affairs.”

Nazīr Aḥmad has placed an educational programme before the women of India in the life and character of Aṣgharī, and described in full detail the principles of domestic science in her words. He has thrown valuable light on conjugal life and domestic relations and revealed how an educated and religious-minded wife may make her husband's life happy and comfortable.

Hālī says : “ When *Mir'at'ul-'Arūs* was first published, Sir Sayyid was much disappointed with the description of the female society of Muslim India given in this book and he took it as a satire against that society.” As a matter of fact, this book does give an exaggerated impression of the illiteracy and backwardness of the *Zenānah* of that age, for the Muslim women of those days were surely not so



steeped in ignorance as depicted by the author.

Nazir Ahmad has painted Aṣgharī as an embodiment of all female virtue but unfortunately he has not dealt with her as a "human" being. She is a serious, silent, intelligent, reasonable and self-sacrificing girl. In her childhood, she is interested in nothing but her study and household affairs. After her marriage, she has no interest besides that of devotion to and service of her partner in life. She appears to be self-composed and serious in every phase of her life. In her childhood, which is the age of play and recreation, she hated idleness. In her youth, when the human heart is full of passion, she is a rock of self-control which can never be shaken by the turmoils of a passionate life. She has a heart which is unaffected by tender feelings, or even if affected, never gives expression to its inner conflicts.

There is no doubt that the expression of such passionate feelings is looked upon as being unworthy of a good lady in the society depicted by Nazir Ahmad, but as a faithful artist of reality, the story-writer ought to throw light on the hidden conflicts raging in the mind of a woman, for, to whatever class of society she may belong, she has a heart liable to throb under the influence of love. Maybe, she is not free to express her desire, yet the desire is there.

And obviously it is unnatural to ignore so important a fact in life.

Another defect which is more noticeable in the Nazir Aḥmad's delineation of Aṣḡharī's character is defects. the failure of Nazir Aḥmad to depict the changes and variations in the mood and psychology of that lady in the various stages of her life. From childhood to youth and from youth to the close of her life, she is represented as a grown-up and worldly-wise woman whose mental faculties are supposed to be developed, even when she was of tender years. Sentiment and passion never overpower her—in no case—not even at the time when she is married, nor when she is separated from her husband. The husband's love for another girl, at a later stage, does not disturb Aṣḡharī in the least, which is unnatural, to say the least of it. Her formalism, her punctiliousness, her disciplined habits and her flawless 'intellectualism', utterly devoid of emotion, make her a model of womanhood in India. She may not be a real woman but she is, surely, a perfect lady, ever depicted in Urdu literature. For purposes of strong contrast and moralising, he painted the two sisters in black and white, respectively. Such a contrast, from the psychological point of view, is crude and too simple for life.

It has already been remarked that Nazir Ahmad's picture of female society, in the pages of the *Mir'at*, is one-sided and unnecessarily dark: but even the characters of men, viz., 'Āqil and Kāmil, are in no way brilliant and seem to be caricatures rather than characters. While 'Āqil is a downright idiot, Kāmil is an unprincipled man and is very unscrupulous.

As a story, *Mir'at-ul-'Arūs* has many drawbacks. The plot has no extraordinary charm; the arrangement is devoid of any artistic skill; and the climax is apparent in the very beginning of the story, making it unnecessary for a reader to wade through the whole book. The *Mir'at* has, however, been very popular in India for the obvious reason that it supplied an interesting reading book for girls and women for whom it was originally intended. The dialogue is in racy idiomatic Urdu as is spoken in Delhi and Lucknow homes. This trait of Nazir Ahmad's talent has given to all of his books an everlasting fame and in spite of their glaring defects, his stories will always be appreciated.

This book is a continuation of the *Mir'at* in which the same Aṣgharī Begam plays the rôle of a teacher and an educationist. She opens a school for the instruction of

girls and, among her pupils, we find a student named Ḥusn Ārā Begam, who is a prototype of Akbarī. Nazīr Aḥmad has given a description of Ḥusn Ārā's early character in a masterly way and has explained beautifully how Aṣgharī brought about a salutary change in the life of Ḥusn Ārā and what educational methods were adopted to educate a girl of a rebellious nature like Ḥusn Ārā. In this book Nazīr Aḥmad shows vastness of knowledge and soundness of information about scientific matters. This is a handbook of general information rather than a story and is indispensable, according to Nazīr Aḥmad, for young students of both sexes. It has been written with a definite didactic object and its characters seem to be mere mechanical creatures moving with clock-like punctuality and discipline, rather than living beings. It is, indeed, a treatise on education.

This story of Nazīr Aḥmad is regarded as the best of his attempts to depict actual life, although, one is tempted to hold that *Ibn'ul-Waqt* is a better achievement from the point of view of a masterly description of the Muslim society in India during a transitional period.

It is a story of a noble family of Delhi, consisting of a husband, a wife, their three daughters and three sons. Kalīm was the eldest son and Na'imah the eldest

The plot.

daughter of Miyān Nuṣūḥ, the head of the family, who had an attack of cholera but was eventually saved from death after reaching the critical stage of illness. During this time he dreamt a dream in which through divine agency he was made conscious of the moral degradation of the family and the deplorable torpor into which he and his household were sunk. This proved a turning-point in the life of Nuṣūḥ, who thenceforward took upon himself the responsibility of reforming his house and persuading his people to lead a more pious and restrained life.

In this noble mission he was confronted with Psychological grave difficulties. It was no easy task types. to remould the lives of a set of psychological types who had already developed their moods and individualities in quite different ways and in a conspicuously different atmosphere. Those who were young and immature, received the new impressions easily and thus Nuṣūḥ had comparatively little difficulty in bringing them to his own viewpoint but the elder ones were not so receptive and offered strong opposition to the teachings of their father. These were Kalīm and Na'imah, who, though endowed with exceptional qualities of head and heart, were yet incapable of understanding the genesis of the sudden change that had come over the life and attitude of their father. The story lays

much emphasis on the tragic consequences of Kalīm's wild and care-free actions and his failure to submit to the will of his father without first convincing himself of the rightness of his father's position. These consequences are natural.

Of the characters of *Tawbat'un-Nuṣūḥ*, Nazīr Kalīm's character Aḥmad is deeply interested in Nuṣūḥ, whose life has been represented as that of a 'rejuvenated' hero and a reformer. But careful readers will feel that the author has, inadvertently depicted one more beautiful and living character in the *Tawbat'un-Nuṣūḥ* which, after that of *Ibn'ul-Waqt*, is the most truthful and genuine delineation of a personality ever painted by Nazīr Aḥmad. It is Kalīm who would appeal to most modern readers and although Nazīr Aḥmad's picture of Kalīm is very dark, yet Kalīm's love of art and culture, his interest in literature and *belles-lettres* and his taste for painting and poetry would endear him to everybody who happens to come into contact with him. With these cultural attainments, he is, not unexpectedly, too credulous. He counts too much on his friends. He is not a practical man of the world. He cannot distinguish between sincere friends and self-seekers. His perseverance and sacrifice for the sake of his own convictions evoke pity and even praise, if not affection.

Nazir Ahmad has exhibited a marvellous insight into the psychology of men (not women) and his knowledge of changing moods under various circumstances is really amazing.

The story is utterly lacking in love and pathos but the sustained interest with which one waits for the climax in the career of Kalim has made the book exceedingly pleasant to read.

Unlike the earlier works, this story abounds in idioms and colloquial expressions current in Delhi, and consequently the language employed is too scholarly for ordinary readers.

*Ibn'ul-Waqt* is, in the opinion of the present writer, the best of Nazir Ahmad's stories and it is in point of popularity alone that *Mir'at'ul-'Arūs* can compete with it. But if the novel is expected to have any bearing on life, one cannot help thinking that *Ibn'ul-Waqt* is the only work of our author which contains a study of life as it existed in those days. It presents the doubts and misgivings which agitated the minds of that generation; it is a portrayal of social and political conditions of the period; and lastly, it portrays the life and attitude of the English people and their relations with the conquered at that early stage of the expansion of the Indian Empire. The details of administration and its various departments

are true and *Ibn'ul-Waqt* is, in no way, of less importance than Sir John Shore's *Notes on Indian Affairs* and Trevelyan's *Good Old Days of John Company*.

The plot deals with a young man of high culture who, though brought up in a conservative atmosphere, liked progressive views on account of his contact with Englishmen. During the Mutiny, he saved the life of an Englishman, Noble by name and, after the passing of the storm, was adequately rewarded by the Government in the form of an appointment as Assistant to Noble himself. His association with Noble changed his attitude about everything old and created an intense desire in him to imitate Englishmen, not only in spirit, but also in the externals of culture such as dress, table etiquette, mode of living and so on and so forth. This made him a target of all sorts of criticism from the people of the old school and among the critics we find one of his relatives, Hujjat'ul-Islam, who is represented as an exponent of old ideals and who combined in himself the qualities of a man of conviction and character. So long as Noble remained in India, he lent his strong support to *Ibn'ul-Waqt* but immediately after his departure, his friend and favourite fell into disfavour with the members of the English society and one of the



Englishmen, Sharp, even expressed his dislike of Ibn'ul-Waqt in strong terms for his English dress and English way of living. Consequently, Ibn'ul-Waqt lost his influence and position and it was through the intercession of Hujjat'ul-Islam that he regained his former status in society. Hated by his own people and not warmly welcomed by the ruling class, Ibn'ul-Waqt lived a miserable life and it is to these dire consequences that the author wants to direct our attention in this book.

Opinion has been expressed by some critics that  
 Is it a portrait of Sir Sayyid? Nazir Ahmad has depicted Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān in his novel, *Ibn'ul-Waqt*. On the other hand, the author has tried to give an impression that this is a transcript of the life of the author himself. We are not interested in discussing this question here because we cannot offer any conclusive proof, this way or that. But this much is certain that *Ibn'ul-Waqt* is a true reflection of the mind of the Muslim society and Nazir Ahmad successfully mirrors in it the moods and psychology of the community immediately before and after the Mutiny. There is no doubt that certain aspects of the story agree with some particular phases of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān's life but the fact remains that Ibn'ul-Waqt was a typical specimen of the Muslim youth of the mid-nineteenth century.

The characters in *Ibn'ul-Waqt* are real, life-like and perfect. Ibn'ul-Waqt has been represented as a prominent scholar who is fully conversant with the old and the new learning and is a man of sound principles. His sense of self-respect, his determination, his indomitable will to face difficulties and his unflinching courage to stick to his convictions steadfastly—all make him a lovable personality.

Hujjat'ul-Islam is equally an interesting figure. His profound scholarship impresses the mind and even his 'fanaticism' is not repugnant. He is admirably sympathetic towards Ibn'ul-Waqt and his difference of opinion with him in religious matters does not affect his sympathy and affection when he finds the former in distress. He is a typically true Muslim of the 19th century.

The characters of the two Englishmen are no less real and interesting and among women, Ibn'ul-Waqt's paternal aunt deserves our praise. In a brief dialogue, Nazir Ahmad has analysed with remarkable success the mentality of the Muslim womenfolk of that age.

In plot and workmanship, *Ibn'ul-Waqt* is very well-conceived and the only flaw which one notices in its passages is the anxiety of the author to hold

forth, to the point of boredom, on every matter that he touches.

Nazir Ahmad has written three other stories  
 viz., *Muḥṣināt* (or *Fasānah-i-Mub-*  
 Other stories. *talā*), *Ayāmā* and *Ru'yā-i-Ṣadiqah*.  
 The *Muḥṣināt* enumerates the evil consequences of  
 polygamy and *Ayāmā* lays stress on the importance  
 of the remarriage of widows. The *Ru'yā-i-Ṣadiqah*  
 exhorts the younger generation to lead a truly reli-  
 gious life and to avoid the raging storm of disbelief  
 and scepticism that had followed in the wake of  
 Western education. It is, in fact, a mild protest and  
 reaction against some of the ideas promoted by Sir  
 Sayyid Ahmad Khān.

It has generally been said that Nazir Ahmad was  
 not a novelist because his primary  
 An estimate of Nazir Ahmad as a story-writer. interest was in the moral of his story.  
 Didacticism and sentimentality are  
 extremely detrimental to a good story and the first  
 and the last duty of a novelist is that he should never  
 preach.

From this particular point of view, Nazir Ahmad  
 is exposed to several objections as a novelist. He  
 was a moralist and a preacher and he was not so  
 much concerned with his art as with the message  
 which he desired to convey to the reader. Some

critics even refuse to believe that he ever wrote 'novels' in the true sense of the term.

But it must be remembered that his claim as a novelist should not be rejected, merely, on the score of his didacticism. There has been a period in the history of the English novel when the novelists aimed at preaching and moralising. For example, Richardson says: "All my stories, I am bold to say, carried with them a useful moral"<sup>1</sup> and it has rightly been said of him that "Richardson was nothing if not a moralist."<sup>2</sup> The same conclusion has been emphasised by Galsworthy in his *Inn of Tranquillity* where the novelist has been presented as a reformer as well as a true recorder of facts. There is no doubt that "Cethru" of Galsworthy "distorted nothing, and did nothing but show that which was there, both fair or foul, no more no less"<sup>3</sup> but he is there to reform the world by bringing to light what is not good along with what is good.

Nazir Ahmad's chief defect is not that he was a moralist but that his pictures are not real and perfect; there is much in them which is artificial. Mere didacticism has not deprived great novelists of their greatness, for example, Thackeray and Hardy for

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1. H. Williams: *Two Centuries of English Novel* (1911), p. 37.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

3. A.C. Ward: *Twentieth Century Literature* (1928), p. 28.

their "novels of protest", Richardson for his *Pamela*, and a number of others who wrote with a purpose, not only in olden times, but also in the 20th century. Nazir Ahmad's stories, like some English novels of this class "were saved not by the remedies proposed or the arguments advanced but solely by the amount of life they objectively depicted and by the open-eyed sympathy they displayed for it." These will live because of their truthful depiction of a phase of the period in which they were written.

To Nazir Ahmad goes the credit of discarding the supernatural element which had crept into the stories produced in India before his time. He gave them a realistic basis and made the depiction of truth his aim. His mental equipment was, however, weak. He did not study the best novels of the world. Nevertheless his observation was minute and his mastery of details wonderful though he was deplorably deficient in the selection of his data.

In fact, Nazir Ahmad was a staunch advocate of the mission of Sir Sayyid Ahmad. His whole work is devoted to this noble task and his whole teaching, conveyed through the medium of the novel, is centred round these two or three major problems.

It is, however, surprising to note that Nazir

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1. Wilson Follett : *Modern Novel* (1928), p. 123.

Aḥmad did not express any progressive views in his novels. His chief interest lay in Education, the pivot-stone of Sir Sayyid's activities. But in other spheres, he did not see eye to eye with his leader. He deprecated the rationalistic tendencies of the Aligarians in *Ru'ya-i-Ṣādiqah*. He is extremely hostile to art and literature, as is evident from his depiction of the character of Kalīm and is a thorough predestinarian, as is clear from his intense love for the character of Ḥujjat'ul-Islam. In politics, he was more liberal than Sir Sayyid Aḥmad but in social matters he did not like the idea of adopting European culture wholesale.

The greatest defect in the novels of Nazīr Aḥmad is the utter absence of the element of love and want of insight into the psychology of women. The language of women in his novel is, however, a redeeming feature and in this he is so realistic that he can never be rivalled by anybody else.

Nazīr Aḥmad's works are a landmark in the evolution of Urdu fiction. With all his defects, no history of Urdu literature can ever afford to omit his name. Like Fielding's *Tom Jones* his *Ibn'ul-Waqt* and *Tawbat'un-Nuṣuḥ* are "not yet obsolete."

In connection with this chapter, the present writer has borrowed some ideas from Mr. 'Abbās 'Alī Ḥusaynī's articles on Nazīr Aḥmad.

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